NEW

100% Unofficial

NINTENDO ALL-STARS

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO NINTENDO'S GREATEST CHARACTERS

100% UNOFFICIAL

Digital Edition

FUTURE

FOURTH EDITION

WELCOME TO NINTENDO ALL-STARS

There's a reason Nintendo is one of the most beloved games publishers of all time and that reason is mascots. The Kyoto-based giant has some of the most recognisable characters of all time, including Link, Samus Aran, Donkey Kong, Kirby, Yoshi and some plumber called Mario. These lovable heroes (and many more besides) have helped turn Nintendo into one of the most dominant forces in gaming, and the games these heroes star in continue to set new ground in their respective genres (just look at the latest *Mario* and *Zelda* games for further proof).

To highlight Nintendo's all-star cast of classic characters, we've personally gone through the last 15 years of the magazine and selected the best articles that celebrate Nintendo's dazzling array of characters and franchises, from Mario and Donkey Kong to *Fire Emblem* and *Animal Crossing*. Hopefully you'll have as much fun reading it as we have making it.

Enjoy!

FUTURE

NINTENDO ALL-STARS

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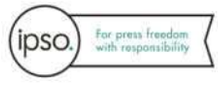

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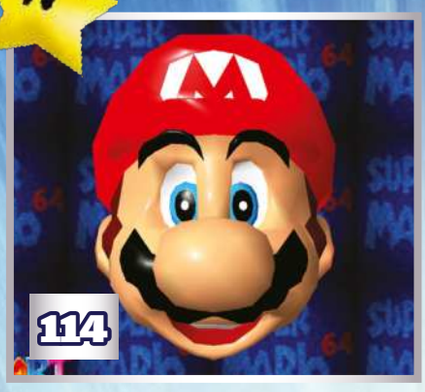

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It might not have been the first game in the series, but this GBA offering is the one many will remember

MR. VIDEO GAME

THE COMPLETE HISTORY OF MARIO

To celebrate Nintendo's most popular mascot, Retro Gamer asks reknowned industry legends to offer up their memories of the character, and gives you the complete lowdown on the plumber's career from Popeye replacement to cultural icon

To fully appreciate why Mario is still the videogame industry's most recognised, popular and enduring character, you have to look back to the early days of videogames. Mario remains the poster child for a time where everything about them felt fresh, innovative and new, and these newfangled virtual worlds sought only to be linked to ours through the computers and consoles that projected them and the talented visionaries who imagined them. With realism and trends now sitting where fun and creativity once ruled, today's industry is looking a much different place to one that Nintendo was helping rebuild back in the early Eighties.

With every familiar-looking sandbox RPG-lite shooter that finds release, it becomes ever apparent that this industry has, in many ways, started to fold in on itself. The insane budgets required to build the games of today mean that now only a small handful of developers and publishers have the financial means to call the shots, game genres seem to be melding together, and despite now being able to utilise gazillions of colours, games are looking a little less colourful. Why the Wii currently stands as the triumphant console of this generation, and *Super Mario Galaxy 2* has scooped universal acclaim, should be obvious to anyone who enjoyed playing videogames throughout the Eighties and Nineties. Nintendo has proven, once again, that fun and creativity are king.

It's for this reason why most gamers can instantly recall the first time they ever saw Mario in action. He takes them back to an evergreen era for videogames, a time with which he has now become synonymous. For many of you reading this, we suspect that your first experience came from playing *Donkey Kong* in arcades, or on home computers and consoles. At this inaugural point in his career, Mario was known by the more literal-sounding name of Jumpman, played a bit of an antihero, and worked as a carpenter instead of the heroic plumber we all know him as today. However, while Mario's personality, name and occupation would come to change quite quickly following his gaming debut in 1981, the distinct look of the character was settled on almost immediately by his creator, Shigeru Miyamoto, and has only really ever been refined, never changed, over the years.

As was the practice in the early days of game design, Mario was borne out from the technical limitations of his time. The character was given his signature flat cap owing to the fact that it would save Miyamoto the headache of animating hair, a large nose to make him look instantly more human, bright red coveralls to help him stand out against *Donkey Kong*'s dark backgrounds, and a moustache instead of a mouth for similar reasons. But Mario's creation also came about through an

SUPER MARIO HIGHLIGHTS

1985 SUPER MARIO BROS

1986 SUPER MARIO BROS THE LOST LEVELS

1988 (USA) SUPER MARIO BROS 2

1988 SUPER MARIO BROS 3

1989 SUPER MARIO LAND

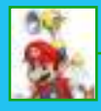
1990 SUPER MARIO WORLD

1992 SUPER MARIO LAND 2: 6 GOLDEN COINS

1995 SUPER MARIO WORLD 2: YOSHIS ISLAND

1996 SUPER MARIO 64

2002 SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE



2006 NEW SUPER MARIO BROS

2007 SUPER MARIO GALAXY

2011 SUPER MARIO 3D WORLD

2017 SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY

MR. VIDEOGAME

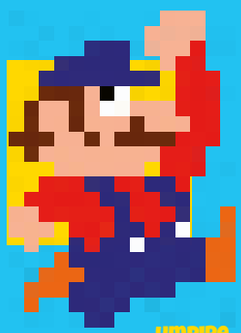
Professions of a plumber

The versatile hero has appeared in a string of occupational cameos for Nintendo over the years...

Carpenter

Donkey Kong 1981

Mario's first ever job was as a mallet-wielding carpenter in *Donkey Kong*. It's likely that his profession was inspired by the everyman-type scenarios on which Nintendo based many of its Game & Watch titles.



Plumber

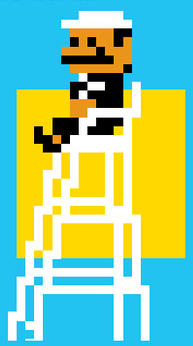
Mario Bros 1983

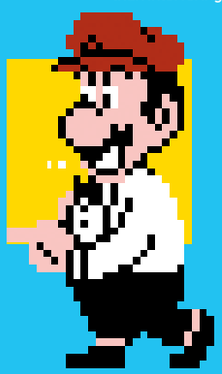
After a two-year stint working as a carpenter, Mario turned his talents to plumbing – as well as the odd bit of pest extermination too – for *Mario Bros*. He kept the role for the subsequent *Super Mario Bros* series.

Umpire

Tennis 1984

Mario earned extra cash at weekends working as a tennis umpire. Later in life he decided to take up the sport himself when he realised that more money was to be had playing than interfering.





Referee

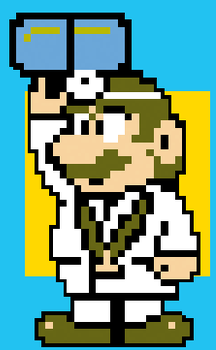
Punch-Out!! 1987

Following a successful spell as a tennis umpire, Mario caught the eye of the Nintendo Boxing Commission and was approached to work as a referee in the Famicom/NES version of *Punch-Out!!*.

Doctor

Dr Mario 1990

Making a mint working as a boxing ref, Mario left labouring to go to medical school. It took him just two years to complete his doctorate – earning him a place in *Guinness World Records*.



Golfer

NES Open Tournament Golf 1991

Like most doctors, Mario found that the best way to relax after a busy day in surgery was to smash a ball into a tiny hole.

Mario Memories

Jim Bagley
Classic Spectrum coder

I first saw Mario in the local arcade halls in New Brighton roughly around 1981 when *Donkey Kong* was released. *Donkey Kong* is and always will be a classic, and a great game to boot, but I can't help but admire so many other *Mario* games. *Super Mario Bros* is another fantastic *Mario* game that even to this day I like to play – even though my nephew completed it before I did! And what favourite *Mario* list would be complete without *Mario Kart*? I loved the N64 version the most, because my nephew, niece, sister and I used to play it at the weekends with riotous laughter, especially when zapping someone on the jump in Wario Stadium. And I can't go without saying *New Super Mario Bros*. I also loved it, again, because of the original features, like being able to grow huge and sprint through the level. Out of those four, those being my favourites, if I had to choose one... I'm not sure I can! They all have a huge place in my heart. Why has Mario remained so enduring? Well because he's constantly re-inventing himself, changing with the times, and because Shigeru Miyamoto is simply a genius.

John Carmack
Co-Founder id Software

I have followed Mario since the *Donkey Kong* days, and id Software was pretty much launched on the merits of an internal clone of *Super Mario Bros 3*. I was away for a while after *Super Mario 64*, but the last few years with my son have brought me back into the fold – we just collected our 66th star on *Super Mario Galaxy 2* last night, and we have gone back through all the old games. Still fun after all these years. Domo arigato, Miyamoto-san!

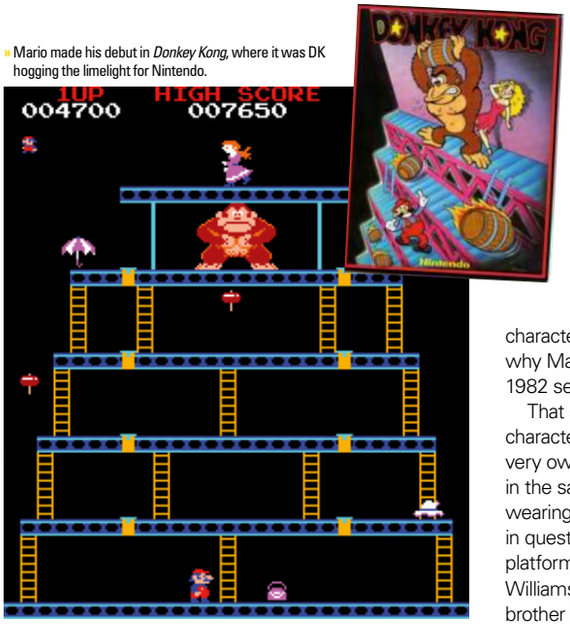
Kevin Toms
Creator of Football Manager

I remember my first recollection of Mario being on the original Nintendo cartridge machine. Squat, cute character, red hat comes to mind. Probably I would go for *Mario Kart* on the Nintendo 64 as my *Mario* game. His lasting appeal is down to the personality he puts across: an upbeat, likable, jolly man. Most people would get on with someone like that. So he annoys no one!

Hudson Soft released two peculiar variants of *Mario Bros* for Japanese home computers.

The original *SMB* still plays great today. We should know – we played it yesterday.

» Mario made his debut in *Donkey Kong*, where it was DK hogging the limelight for Nintendo.



element of luck and good fortune – although it probably didn't seem that way to Nintendo at the time.

'I'LL SAVE YER, LADY!'

Before *Donkey Kong* was even considered, Shigeru Miyamoto had aims to create a new arcade game starring the characters from the popular King Features Syndicate cartoon, *Popeye*. But when Nintendo failed to obtain the licence, Miyamoto was forced to come up with three central characters of his own. And, after taking pretty obvious inspiration from the 1933 stop-motion monster classic, *King Kong*, he came up with the characters Jumpman, Lady and Donkey Kong to substitute the roles of Popeye, Olive Oyl and Bluto, respectively.

When the time came for *Donkey Kong* to ship to North America, however, it was decided that Jumpman should be renamed during the localisation process. Even then, Nintendo's intention was to turn Mario into a mascot-type character by having him appear in many of Miyamoto's subsequent videogames. With this idea in mind, the first new name that Nintendo would settle on for Jumpman was 'Mr Video'. It was a name clearly derived from Nintendo's first ever gaming mascot, Mr Game & Watch.

However, in what became one of the videogame industry's most bizarre anecdotes, Jumpman's name would change once again. The tale goes that, at the time when Nintendo of America (NOA) was trying to gain a foothold in North America, it was renting a warehouse from an Italian construction tycoon named Mario Segale. Segale was said to have looked remarkably similar to Jumpman, and when NOA's president at the time, Minoru Arakawa, realised the coincidence, Jumpman was nicknamed Mario and the name stuck. What makes the story all the more ironic is the fact that Mario Segale's business was construction, an industry that played a prominent role in the look of *Donkey Kong*'s stages. We can neither confirm nor deny whether Segale once owned a giant gorilla that he would occasionally mistreat, though we're guessing that it was highly unlikely.

With the character renamed, Lady rechristened Pauline, and the localisation process complete, Nintendo pushed *Donkey Kong* out onto the US market, where it became a huge success. And with the millions of dollars it earned, the company was able to fund development of its first true videogame console, the Famicom. But it was Donkey Kong, not Mario, who was gaining the most celebrity for Nintendo. Despite the fact that the big dumb ape was assigned the role of big dumb antagonist in *Donkey Kong*, his domineering presence and cartoon qualities made him a clear standout character in the game. And it is perhaps for this reason why Mario was then made to play villain in the game's 1982 sequel, *Donkey Kong Jr.*

That said, Nintendo, obviously not wanting to turn its character into an out-and-out baddie, did give Mario his very own game in the same year, plonking him back in the saddle of hero and gifting him a green coverall-wearing brother called Luigi into the bargain. The game in question, *Mario Bros*, was a single-screen action platformer that looked and played similar to the earlier Williams arcade game *Joust*. It saw Mario and his brother battle through 'phases' of enemy attacks inside a New York sewer, and was the first game to ever depict the brothers as plumbers – it's believed that this was done simply to explain the game's culvert setting. However, with its premise finding the pair trying to prevent an infestation of insect and reptilian pests escaping into the city, the brothers are clearly acting more like exterminators in the game. Nevertheless, as well as portraying the brothers as plumbers, *Mario Bros* also introduced a few common enemy types too, such as Shellcreepers – a precursor to Koopa Troopas – and the annoying spike-shelled foes, the Spinies. It also established the idea of having the brothers collect coins through bonus rounds, as well as the concept of brick-punching and unconscious-enemy toe-punting, all of which would become staples of the *Mario* series.

» Who can forget this trick in World 1-2? Who was it that said cheating doesn't pay? Someone who'd never played *Super Mario Bros*, clearly.

Mario Bros received a lukewarm arcade reception, certainly nothing in the same league as *Donkey Kong*, but later proved to be a popular release for the NES in North America. Two variants of the game were also developed by Hudson Soft, under licence from Nintendo. Released exclusively on Japanese home computers, the games featured all-new original stages and gameplay mechanics. The first, *Mario Bros Special*, was an interesting update of the original game that saw players having to fight their way to exit points at the top of each stage, while the second title, *Punch Ball Mario Bros*, was a quirky dodgeball-inspired iteration that saw the brothers punching balls at their subterranean foes and hitting switches. Hudson Soft also later released its own version of *Super Mario Bros*. Titled *Super Mario Bros Special*, this unfairly punishing home computer version featured all-new levels, hair-pulling level design and maddening flick-screen scrolling. In fact, the dodgy scrolling mars the experience so much that it shows just how important a factor scrolling actually played in *Super Mario Bros*' ultimate success.

But we're jumping ahead of ourselves a bit here, as Mario hadn't quite gone 'super' just yet. In fact, while it's debatable that Miyamoto dabbled with the idea of giving Mario enhanced powers in *Mario Bros* by finally giving him the ability to survive a fall – he wasn't capable of bending his knees in *Donkey Kong* – it wasn't really until the release of *Super Mario Bros* in 1985 that the legendary game designer gave his creation real super powers. Before reaching this watershed moment, though, the character could be seen busily living up to his 'Mr Video' duties. The multipurpose butterball could be seen popping up in a bonus stage in the NES game *Pinball* that same year, guest appearing as an unshaven umpire in *Tennis* (1984), and influencing the look of *Golf*'s (1984) moustachioed golfer Ossan, a character

MARIO MEMORIES

Eugene Jarvis
Arcade legend

My first recollection of Mario was in *Donkey Kong*. The character was ridiculous. Why am I a carpenter trying to rescue a princess from King Kong? *Super Mario Bros* is the greatest videogame of all time. It is etched in my brain like a phosphorescent cattle brand. Mario is the video star. He has been flogged and baked into the collective memory of humanity for 30 years. When the last cockroach is dead he will dance on the grave.

Jamie Woodhouse
Creator of Qwak!

I'm fairly sure my first experience of Mario was *Mario Bros* on the NES; I remember it not scrolling, just a static screen, with lots of turtles that go into pipes in the bottom corners of the screen, then coming out of pipes in the top corners. Characters were all simple, yet fun-looking, with a cutesy round feel to them. I think my all-time favourite *Mario* game is probably *Super Mario Land* on the Game Boy: simple, fun gameplay, not too complicated graphically, and of course, it was portable! I think maybe Mario's appeal is down to the personality of the character; I mean, he's not really a violent kind of dude, is he? And he's only there in the first place because he's trying to sort out the big bad boss or rescue his girlfriend – or was that the other game, the one with the big monkey? So I guess, maybe because he's not too violent, and he's there for a good reason, people maybe relate to that. Also, it can't hurt having the Nintendo marketing department on your side!

MR. VIDEOGAME

MARIO MEMORIES

Jon Hare
Co-Founder Sensible Software

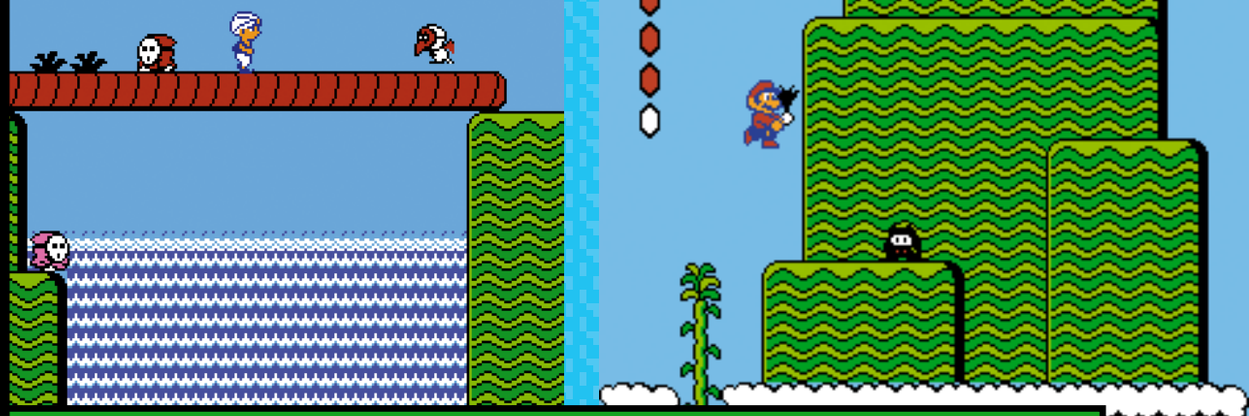
First time I saw Mario was *Donkey Kong* in the arcades in about 1980. I didn't focus on the character much, to be honest – nothing that special. I thought the monkey was the best thing in the game. My all-time favourite *Mario* game has to be *Mario Golf* on the N64. It just has the most perfectly tuned learning curve ever. I spent a whole year trying to win every trophy and kept missing the final one by just one shot. Next best titles would be *Mario 64* and *Mario Kart*. I think Mario endures because he is a really good everyman character, funny but not too irritating, and he has an army of fellow characters that add a lot to him. Miyamoto is the only game designer that I look up to.

MARIO MEMORIES

Scott Miller
Founder of Apogee Software

I first remember Mario playing *Donkey Kong*, of course! When I first discovered this game in an arcade I knew it had something special about it, interesting characters, unique gameplay, variety, and it was a deeply polished game. From the get-go I knew it was the start of a new era, but no one could have guessed the staying power of this squatty plumber!

If you think this game looks a lot like *SMB2*, that's because 95 per cent of it is.



Alex Trowers
Designer of classic Bullfrog games

I suppose the first time I saw Mario in action was in *Super Mario Bros*, but that's only because the Mario in *Donkey Kong* was called Jumpman. I found *SMB* a bit meh – despite the knocking-things-over-from-underneath mechanic and a two-player option, the whole thing felt a little repetitive. I loved *Donkey Kong* in the arcades, though, and the ColecoVision version, which was the scene of some epic high-score battles between my brother, my mum and I. I can also remember a version of *Super Mario 3* on an old Nintendo Play Choice 10 machine in a local kebab shop. That was entertaining. Suddenly Mario could do all manner of interesting things and that was quite appealing. My favourite *Mario* game is a toss-up between *Super Mario World* on the Super Famicom and *Super Mario 64* on the N64. Some guys from Imagineer brought a Super Famicom over around the time of the Japanese launch and lent it to us. It had two games: *F-Zero* and *Super Mario World*. We played them both pretty religiously, to the extent that we managed to overheat and blow up the console.

Super Mario World was one of the first games I completed in Japanese despite there being a whole ton of stuff that Mario could do. I couldn't read any of the hints, meaning I missed the one about being able to throw shells up in the air. This meant that to complete the final boss, I had to get the cape on an earlier level and make it through the last castle without getting hit. Once at the boss stage, I had to wait on one side of the screen for him to drop a Koopa before running along, jumping, hitting the thing and grabbing the shell all in one go before using the momentum to fly up to the top of the screen and dropping the shell on him from above. I remember thinking it was a bit tricky at the time but I put it down to just being the end of the game.

John Romero
Co-Founder of id Software

The first time I saw Mario in action, I was at an arcade in Roseville, California, called Supercade. It was a weekend in 1981 and my friend Robert was with me. At this time in 1981, new games were showing up every week. The arcades were the most exciting places in the world. And in this particular arcade, this particular weekend, was a new game called *Donkey Kong*. We went up to the game, dropped in our quarters, and lost ourselves for several hours. When the smoke cleared, we had found a new favourite game and a favourite carpenter named Jumpman, who would be renamed in four years to the familiar name: Mario. We loved Mario's pixelated figure, his cute animations and cuter sound effects. His job was to rescue the princess and put out fire with a mallet. We loved the ridiculousness of it, and it fit in perfectly with the extreme abstractness of games of that time. For me, *Super Mario 3* was the pinnacle. It was just so epic. That game pushed the original NES to the extreme. The cartridge was packed to the limit with data – the game was huge at the time. And it took a while to play through. I was playing it in my Gamer's Edge office next to John Carmack as he coded.

often mistaken for Mario, owing to his stark resemblance to Nintendo's mascot.

SUPER MARIO... FINALLY

Super Mario Bros was, in many respects, the natural next step for the main series to take. It took the popular 'rescue the girl' premise of *Donkey Kong*, applied it to the theme and two-player mode – albeit not simultaneous this time – introduced in *Mario Bros*, and then stretched the gameplay into a revolutionary side-scrolling platform game. Set in the fantasy fungal world of the Mushroom Kingdom, the 'Super' prefix came from the brothers' peculiar reaction to ingesting magic mushrooms, which took the form of power-ups in the game. Eating a mushroom would cause Mario and Luigi to grow in size, this growth spurt essentially acting like a shield but at the cost of making them easier for enemies to hit. And while in this state the eating of a Fire Flower power-up would make the plumbers truly super-powered, dressing them in lustrous white overalls and giving them the ability to lob fireballs.

Speaking in 1991's *Mario Mania Player's Guide*, Miyamoto revealed how the brothers' iconic growth spurt ability in the game came about: "We developed programming techniques that allowed us to create a larger character than we originally thought possible. At first, we planned to make the game so that the player was always 'big' Mario, but eventually, we came up with the idea for the power-up mushroom to make Mario Super."

Super Mario Bros was praised for its innovative gameplay, great visuals, catchy music, super-smooth scrolling, and wealth of secrets to discover – the most notable of which saw Mario actually breaking out of his own videogame in World 1-2; a truly mind-bending concept at the time, made even more impressive by the fact that doing so rewarded the player with the opportunity to warp to later levels in the game.

Selling over 40 million copies, *Super Mario Bros*' popularity can be largely attributed to the success of the Famicom/NES, and thus for also playing a key role in helping to resurrect the console industry in North America following its crash in 1983. In fact, *Super Mario Bros* currently stands as the second bestselling videogame of all time, only topped by *Wii Sports Resort* last year, demonstrating the sheer impact that this single game had on the games industry.

But *Super Mario Bros* wasn't the only *Mario* title released in 1985. The little-known NES game *Wrecking Crew* saw Mario continue in the tradition of his earlier arcade-style games. Rearmed with his trusty carpenter's hammer, and accompanied by Luigi, the game was a fun mix of smash-'em-up and puzzle

game. Capping the brothers' ability to jump, *Wrecking Crew* saw Mario and Luigi race around, smashing bricks and pillars in an advantageous order so as to clear each stage of everything destructible. It even came with a level designer. But while a neat concept, it fell into obscurity in the shadow of *Super Mario Bros.*

Sequel sequel panic

Now if there's one thing that Nintendo was seen to struggle with during the 8-bit era, it was sequels. While *Donkey Kong Jr* was an enjoyable enough successor, it really wasn't a patch on the tight, engaging and insanely addictive gameplay of *Donkey Kong*. And while *Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link* had its good moments, to this day it's still deemed by many fans to be one of the weakest entries in the series. The *Super Mario Bros* series is no different and follows this peculiar pattern.

"Mario played a key role in resurrecting the American industry"

Owing to *Super Mario Bros*' success, Nintendo was understandably keen to capitalise on the game's amazing popularity and so quickly pushed out an expert version exclusively for the Famicom Disk System to satiate demand. Released in 1986 as *Super Mario Bros 2* in Japan, it was a single-player game only, with players given the choice of picking between a 'Mario game' or 'Luigi game', and the brothers were given different attributes: Mario had better traction; Luigi a higher jump. On top of this, the difficulty level was also increased, and the game made more challenging through the inclusion of poisonous mushrooms and more aggressive enemies. But when the game came to ship to North America, NOA stressed its concerns that the game wasn't different enough to be deemed a true sequel to the first, and would be too challenging for Western gamers. Consequently, Nintendo was forced to do some rapid troubleshooting, and this led it to re-skin another platform game by Miyamoto and his team titled *Yume Kojo: Doki Doki Panic*.

Released for the Famicom Disk System in Japan, *Doki Doki* garnered modest sales, likely owing to its Disk System exclusivity, and so Nintendo had the brainwave of switching the game's four Arabian heroes with Mario, Luigi, Toad and Princess Toadstool (Peach) and repackaging it as *Super Mario Bros 2* in the West. Without the aid of the internet back then, a very large proportion of the planet would be none the wiser of this cheeky game swap. Of course, we later got the chance to test our skills on the Japanese sequel when it was remade as *Super Mario Bros: The Lost Levels* for the 1993 *Super Mario All-Stars* compilation pack on the Super Nintendo.

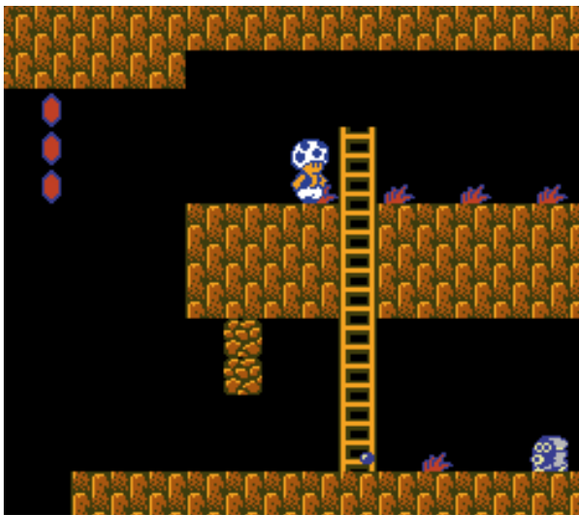
To tie everything together, *Doki*'s story was altered to explain away all the crazy Arabian leftovers – something about Mario entering a dream world called Subcon to defeat an evil frog overlord to free some enslaved fairy kids – and the game switch also explains why many of the enemies in the game never reappeared in subsequent *Mario* games, and Mario and pals' peculiar new attack method, which ditches head-stomping to see them instead pick up objects and enemies and toss them at other enemies to defeat them.

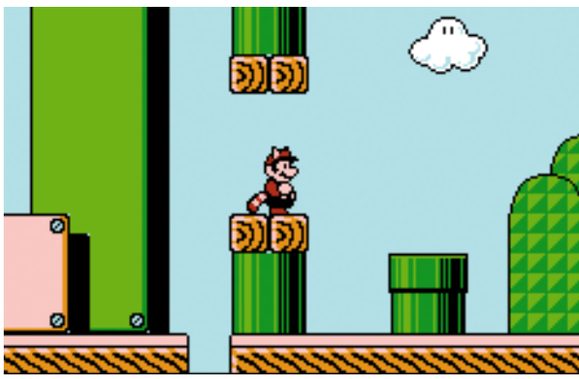
Released in the US in 1988, the re-skinned *Doki Doki* version of *Super Mario Bros 2* became a hot seller for the NES, becoming the third-bestselling game on the console, trading more copies than *The Legend Of Zelda*. And owing to its success, this version was later released in Japan in 1992 under the name *Super Mario USA*.

Hollywood comes-a knockin'

Towards the end of the Eighties, *Mario*-mania was starting to take effect, and its momentum was to be fuelled even further with the release of a game that many fans still consider to be the best game in the series. Taking two years to create, *Super Mario Bros 3* introduced more staples to the *Mario* series than any sequel before or since. It introduced elements such as an overworld map, complete with patrolling enemies that whisked the player to battle screens; enjoyable diversions by way of photo-fit mini-games; multiple routes through the game's eight massive worlds; new power-ups in the form of abstract costumes for the brothers; an inventory that allowed you to carry over items obtained in one stage into another, and more secrets than you could shake a Warp Whistle at.

To help create awareness and excitement for the release of the game in the US, *Super Mario Bros 3* was memorably first unveiled

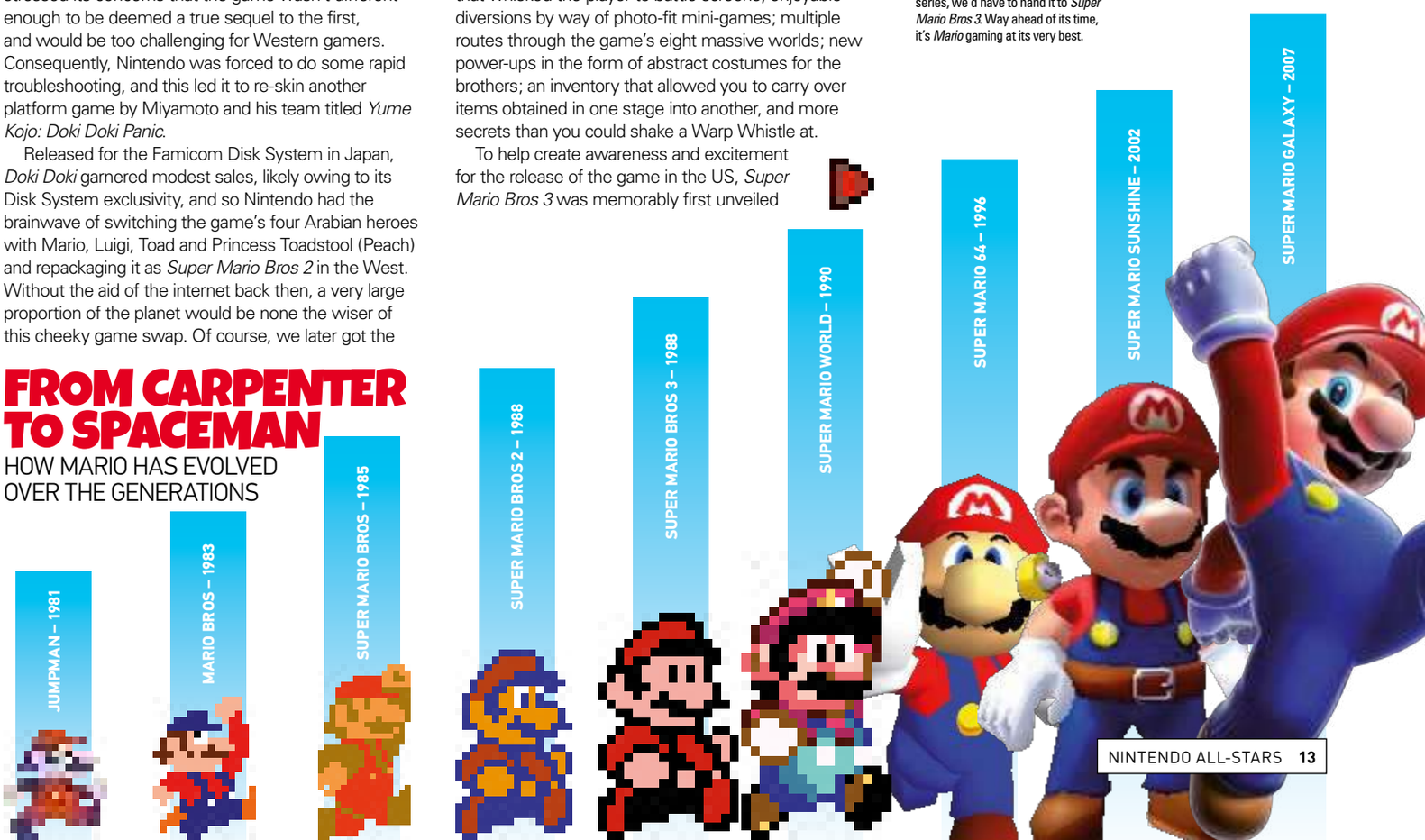




» If we had to pick the best game in the series, we'd have to hand it to *Super Mario Bros 3*. Way ahead of its time, it's *Mario* gaming at its very best.

From carpenter to spaceman

HOW MARIO HAS EVOLVED OVER THE GENERATIONS


JUMPMAN – 1981
MARIO BROS – 1983
SUPER MARIO BROS – 1985
SUPER MARIO BROS 2 – 1988
SUPER MARIO BROS 3 – 1988
SUPER MARIO WORLD – 1990
SUPER MARIO 64 – 1996
SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE – 2002
SUPER MARIO GALAXY – 2007

MR. VIDEOGAME

» The colourful *Super Mario World* stuck close to the *SMB3* template.

MARIO MEMORIES

Gary Bracey Software Manager Ocean Software

I spent quite some time in the early Eighties playing in the arcades, and so my first actual introduction to Mario was *Donkey Kong*. I recall he was the first 'human' character I had seen in games, as all others were cartoon or abstract like *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man*. My next major encounter was when Ocean obtained the rights to convert the first *Mario Bros* platform game, which was an okay game. However, when I discovered *Super Mario Bros* on the NES I was completely blown away and spent many, many weeks playing it to completion... and then playing it again! It's one of the few franchises that has never suffered from compromise. Nintendo recognises this and *Zelda* to be its bar-setting titles, and also its console-shifting games. If they released a sub-par version then not only would the whole perception of the franchise suffer, but it would probably impact sales of the hardware. As for the character itself, he is as synonymous with Nintendo as Mickey Mouse is to Disney, yet a lot more contemporary. Over the years they have managed to develop his personality to keep pace with the advances in console technology, so from the original few pixels there is now a 'fleshed out' character with personality and charisma. From my own perspective, Mario is a reason alone to purchase any new Nintendo console, and I can think of no greater compliment to pay.

Trip Hawkins Founder of Electronic Arts

Naturally my first time seeing Mario was *Donkey Kong* in an arcade in Silicon Valley, perhaps 30 years ago. Miyamoto-san is the best game designer in the history of the industry, and Mario's appeal is ubiquitous.

to Americans in the 1989 feature film *The Wizard*. Released into theatres a few months prior to the game's North American release, the movie's plot culminated in a Nintendo videogame tournament that ended with the finalists competing on a mysterious 'new game', which is revealed to be *Super Mario Bros 3*. Probably at the request of Nintendo, the game is hilariously unveiled in the film as if it were the single most brilliant objet d'art in the history of mankind. Although in hindsight we can let Nintendo off a little, as it actually comes pretty darn close.

But that wasn't all in the way of *Mario* marketing that year, as 1989 also spawned an animated/live action television show: *The Super Mario Bros Super Show!* The programme was an odd format that comprised a short ten-minute cartoon bookended by a peculiar live-action sitcom, in which Luigi was played by actor Danny Wells and Mario by former professional WWF wrestler Captain Lou Albano. Filmed in front of a probably perplexed studio audience, the show saw the pair conversing with drop-in celebrity guests from inside their *Bottom*-style dilapidated New York apartment, and in some episodes dress up in women's clothes to portray female versions of Mario and Luigi named Marianne and Luigeena. And if you think that sounds like a bizarre idea for a *Mario Bros* television show, during the holiday season of 1989 and 1990, Southern Californians witnessed *King Koopa's Kool Kartoons*, a live-action Krusty the Clown-type kids' telly show in which a guy dressed as Bowser presented cartoons to a room full of children, fondly referred to in the show as 'Koopa Troopas'.

1989 also marks the release of the Game Boy and saw Mario lose the pounds for his first proper portable adventure, *Super Mario Land*. A launch title for the Game Boy in Japan and North America, *Super Mario Land* was overseen by the *Donkey Kong* co-designer and *Metroid* and *Kid Icarus* producer, Gunpei Yokoi, and his solo involvement in the game resulted in a unique *Mario* title for the handheld. Putting his own stamp on the series, head-stomping Koopa Troopas now turned them into ticking time bombs, while striking some enemies in the game transformed them into a pile of decomposing bones. And elements of Yokoi's earlier work also found their way subtly into the game, such as a subterranean-style stage reminiscent of *Metroid* (Level 3-4) and the game ending with a side-scrolling shooter stage that saw Mario piloting a plane – a similar closing stage also occurred in *Kid Icarus*. Likely owing to Mario's popularity and the Game Boy's high installed base, *Super Mario Land* became a hugely successful *Mario* title, going on to sell more than 14 million units. It also spawned two sequels: *Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins*, notable for introducing Mario's doppelgänger Wario to the series, and *Wario Land: Super Mario Land 3*, in which the demented-looking villain took centre stage as a controllable character, in another first for the series.

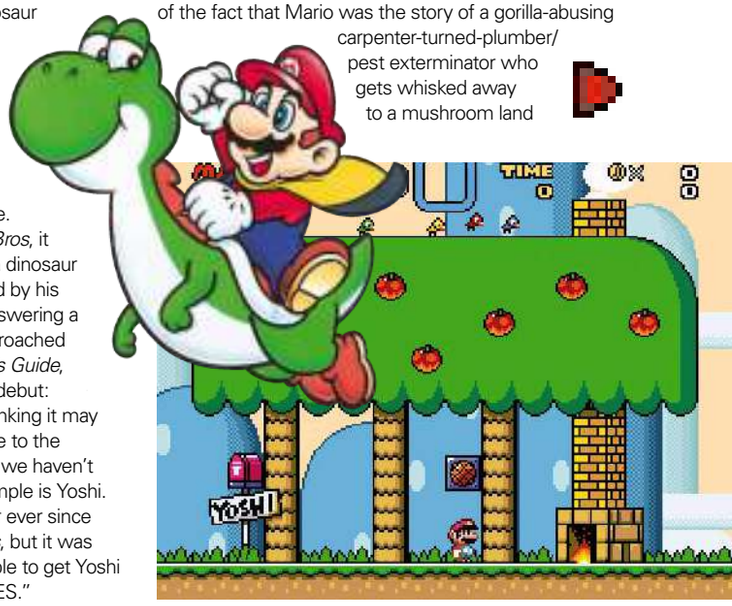
The arrival of the fourth generation of games consoles was an exciting time. Both the arcade and console markets were thriving, the NES had successfully brought gaming back home in North America, and Sega was officially first off the mark to make inroads into this new 16-bit era of gaming with the Mega Drive. With Mario now a global household name, gamers were eagerly anticipating the release of Nintendo's next instalment, especially as it was to be launched alongside its new-fangled 16-bit games console.

Released in 1990, *Super Mario World* stuck close to the *Super Mario Bros 3* template. Miyamoto and his team set about using the extra technical power of the Super Nintendo to create an enhanced, but not necessarily more innovative, version of the NES classic. Gone were the enjoyable mini-games and inventory, and Mario received a new makeover as well as an array of new power-ups, including a yellow cape that afforded him the power of temporary flight, and a lovable green dinosaur companion in the form of Yoshi – a character whose grabbing tongue was possibly inspired by Nintendo's popular Ultra Hand grabbing toy, and whose name could have derived as a portmanteau of Nintendo's then-president, Hiroshi Yamauchi. This is all pure **Retro Gamer** speculation, of course.

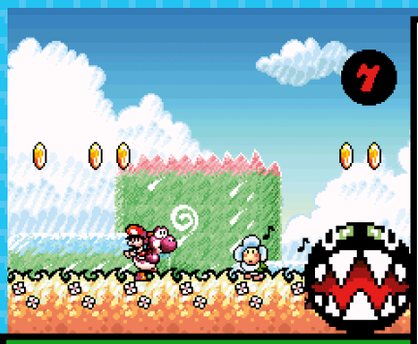
Following the release of *Super Mario Bros*, it was Miyamoto's intention to give Mario a dinosaur steed – an idea said to have been inspired by his motocross racing game, *Excitebike*. In answering a question about how he and his team approached *Mario* sequels in the *Mario Mania Player's Guide*, Miyamoto explained the delay in Yoshi's debut: "Once the game is released, we start thinking it may not be such a bad idea to add another title to the series. We usually have lots of ideas that we haven't been able to implement yet. A good example is Yoshi. We wanted to have Mario ride a dinosaur ever since we finished the original *Super Mario Bros*, but it was impossible technically. We were finally able to get Yoshi off the drawing boards with the Super NES."

Nintendo then followed up *Super Mario World* with *Super Mario Kart*. It became the bestselling racing game on the system, and Mario's most successful spin-off game series. Mario was now showing himself as a cultural icon, and the versatile face of Nintendo. In fact, his popularity had swelled so much that it was almost a given that the character would pique the interest of film studios wanting to cash in on his celebrity. And so Mario and Luigi did the inevitable, heading to the big screen for a live-action retelling of their videogame antics for the 1993 movie *Super Mario Bros*, plonking actors Bob Hoskins, John Leguizamo and Dennis Hopper in the roles of Mario, Luigi and Bowser, respectively. However, for all its promise and hype, the movie, which decides to throw out the colourful *Mario Bros* universe to plonk the brothers inside some kind of rubbish version of *Total Recall*, tanked at the box office and was branded an unmitigated big-budget failure, and Mario has never made a return to Tinseltown since.

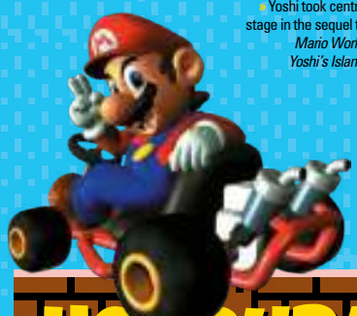
Mario's next big Super Nintendo release came in the form of *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island*. In the game, Mario and Luigi were depicted as babies, with the player now fully assuming the role of a Yoshi and tasked with completing a colourful relay race to get Mario safely to his parents. Of course, given the infant ages of the brothers in the game, *SMW2* is deemed a prequel to the entire Mario series. Its story is thus pure retcon, as the game's ending shows the brothers delivered to their parents, who are seen living inside a house in the Mushroom Kingdom. That said, when you remember that before this point we were all accepting of the fact that Mario was the story of a gorilla-abusing carpenter-turned-plumber/pest exterminator who gets whisked away to a mushroom land



"SMB3 was unveiled like the most brilliant objet d'art in history. It's actually close"



Yoshi took centre stage in the sequel to *Mario World*, *Yoshi's Island*.



Mario Memories

Philip and Andrew Oliver Co-Founders Blitz Software

PO: We first saw Mario appear in the *Donkey Kong* arcade game in 1981. A few years later, in 1988, we went to the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas and were stunned by the magnitude of the games industry and the size of Nintendo's presence. And at the heart of it all was Mario. At that time, *Super Mario Bros* was at its height on the NES – I think they'd sold in the region of 20 million copies, which was incredible.

AO: I remember seeing *Mario Bros* on a Japanese imported NES in about 1986. I remember it looking clean, slick and very playable. And best of all, it was instantly easily accessible. The first time I saw Mario as a character was in the arcade game *Donkey Kong*. Back then he didn't strike me as a brilliant character, but he always starred in brilliant games.

PO: All the Mario games are great. I guess we played the original a fair bit, but it was *Super Mario 64* that proved to the world that character games work better in 3D. Andrew will definitely go for *Mario Kart*, as it's his all-time favourite game! It's up there near the top with me too.

AO: Mario represents games of brilliant gameplay. He's also had a lot of work done on his 'personality', as the graphical powers of machines have been updated. Each revision has been very skilfully managed and has served to embellish and deepen Mario's qualities – they've been careful never to change his persona fundamentally, so the Mario today is essentially the same guy as the Mario of the Eighties.

Steve Lycett Sumo Digital

Boringly, I'll have to plump for *Super Mario World* as my favourite *Mario* game. I got a SNES for my 18th birthday, and lost weeks of my life hunting down all the hidden exits, completing Star Road and then rinsing it twice for the second credits sequence. An amazing game that's clearly ageing better than I am! I think his appeal simply boils down to quality. Bar the odd exception, if it's got 'Mario' in the title you know you'll be getting something that's been built with love, care and attention to detail, and will provide you with hours of fun. I'll happily buy a *Mario* title without reading a single review. Nintendo will always deliver the goods!

Ralph Baer Creator of videogames

To me, Mario is a living presence. I still have the original NES and the *Duck Hunt*/*Mario* cart that goes with it. Over the decades I have demonstrated interacting physically with the *Duck Hunt* game in the manner of today's Wii games. As has been so often the case, I was 20 years too early with those concepts. Meanwhile, who can resist playing the original *Mario* game when that old TV set is turned on in my demo area and I'm not bringing down those ducks by lobbing something physical at them?

Honourable Mentions

Here are some of the more unusual Mario games, which aren't part of the Super Mario canon

MARIO CLASH
VIRTUAL BOY
■ This red-looking 3D redux of the original *Mario Bros* coin-op was the first of two *Mario* games released for the Virtual Boy, the other being *Mario Tennis*. It's also the first ever 3D *Mario* game, if you discount *Super Mario Kart*.

ALLEYWAY
GAME BOY
■ Although not really a *Mario* game per se, this decent *Breakout* clone saw Mario piloting the game's bat. You couldn't actually tell this from the in-game graphics, mind, but he's there on the front of the box art, sporting some natty overalls.

MARIO PAINT
SUPER NINTENDO
■ One of the few games to use the Super Nintendo's mouse peripheral, which came as a pack-in with the game, this artistic spin-off allowed budding artists to create drawings, stamps and animations and then set them to sounds using a music generator.

HOTEL MARIO
PHILLIPS CD-I
■ Often cited as being the worst *Mario* game ever. This CD-i puzzle title was a waste product from the messy Super Nintendo CD saga and tasked players with rescuing Princess Toadstool by closing a whole bunch of doors, for reasons never explained.

ALL NIGHT NIPPON SUPER MARIO BROS
FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM
■ This game would be considered one of the most bizarre *Mario* clones to find release, were it not released by Nintendo. This *Super Mario Bros/Lost Levels* fusion featured DJs from a popular Japanese radio show.

MARIO EDUCATION GAMES
NES, SNES, PC
■ The plumber also appeared in a series of educational games. These included the geography-themed *Mario Is Missing!*; the typing trainer, *Mario Teaches Typing*; and *Mario's Time Machine*, a thinly veiled history lesson.

SUPER MARIO EXCITEBIKE
SUPER NINTENDO (SATELLAVIEW)
■ Mario and friends appeared in this little-known *Excitebike* title, which meshed together *Mario Kart* with motocross. Released in four parts, it was only available through the Satellaview service.

A FRIENDLY RIVALRY... EVENTUALLY

No feature on Mario would be complete without at least mentioning the epic 16-bit videogame war that Mario played a major part in. During the height of the 16-bit generation, school playgrounds around the globe were divided. One side bound together by a love for a dinosaur-riding Italian plumber named Mario; the other in support for a skittish, edgy and nippy blue hedgehog called Sonic. These two company mascots could scarcely be more different, but together their rivalry spearheaded one of the most exciting periods in gaming ever. With each console generation that passed their competition softened, until Sega eventually bailed out of the hardware market altogether in 2001. What happened next, no school kid back in 1993 could ever have predicted: Sega started releasing *Sonic* games on Nintendo consoles, starting with *Sonic Adventure 2 Battle* on Nintendo's GameCube. And then two videogame mascots got to finally settle their differences publicly when they appeared together in the game *Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Games* in 2007, followed by the long-awaited chance to beat the crap out of each other in 2008's *Super Smash Bros Brawl*.

MARIO MEMORIES

Martyn Brown Team 17 Founder

Obviously, like many people, I first saw Mario in *Donkey Kong*, but he really played second fiddle to DK. It's amazing to think that Nintendo took the Mario character and threw him into the *Super Mario* world, as it was an anonymous character before then. I wasn't super sure what to make of the first true *Mario* game in terms of character, other than it being brilliantly playable – I was too busy with the Amiga around that time anyway. I think my favourite *Mario* game has been *Super Mario 64*, the first 3D offering, because it was so incredibly well-considered for its time. I've enjoyed the past games, but they get a bit too hardcore for me. Mario's remained so enduring because he's so charming and a lot of fun. The games are generally so well-balanced to play that it's difficult to get too frustrated and therefore swear at him, although I'm sure it's been done a few times – even by me.

David Braben Co-Creator of Elite

I think my first experience of Mario was in a pub, in the original *Donkey Kong*. To be honest I didn't particularly register the character, more the way the game was played, which seemed a little bizarre at the time! *Mario 64* on the Nintendo 64 was the first Mario game I really enjoyed playing, as it was, for me at least, less annoying than the previous outings. Later games are great too, but *Mario 64* sticks in my mind the strongest, as for its time it was a great trailblazer. Interestingly, in the days of *Donkey Kong* and *Super Mario Bros* the character image was pretty indistinct and heavily pixelated. Later games featured him as an image, and I think that is when he started to be identified, but *Mario 64* was the first game, I think, that really made a character out of him, for example when he spoke on the title screen of the game. If anything, especially in the USA, I think he has become the icon of Nintendo. Other factors – like the fact that he seems to run like a toddler does – makes him pretty endearing. He is a pretty non-threatening character.

» Mario's back on top form following two superb Wii titles that are literally out of this world.

through a giant pipe and must then rescue their princess from a giant turtle king, we guess such changes can be forgiven.

Released in 1996, Mario's final Super Nintendo outing saw him throw his cap into another new genre, this time the RPG with the Square-developed *Super Mario RPG: Legend Of The Seven Stars*. The game was a mixture of isometric platform RPG and turn-based battles, and the game's visuals utilised the snazzy ACM graphics techniques seen in *Donkey Kong Country*. But coming late in the Super Nintendo's life, and only released in the US and Japan, it was largely missed by many on its release.

MARIO REACHES 64

Another new console saw another groundbreaking entry in the *Mario* series come, this time in the form of *Super Mario 64* for the N64. Always innovating, Nintendo once again sought to revolutionise the platform genre, and in doing so proved undoubtedly that the creative, fun, engaging and abundant gameplay of previous *Mario* adventures could adapt to a true 3D polygon world unscathed. The N64's analogue controls also worked overtime to further enhance the experience. With a wealth of new acrobatic moves at Mario's disposal, *Mario 64* turned him from portly jumpy plumber into a gaming Baryshnikov. Finally, through a series of open-ended levels – all connected by a castle-shaped hub – that unfurled with each revisit, it offered players the chance to really immerse themselves in the colourful and enchanting world of the Mushroom Kingdom. It was truly the gaming equivalent of chasing the rabbit down to Wonderland, and with the inclusion of Mips the rabbit in the game, who spouted dialogue very similar to Lewis Carroll's tardy White Rabbit, this notion was clearly not lost on Miyamoto and his EAD team.

Following the release of *Mario 64*, Mario himself then broke into even more game genres with the first entry in the Hudson-developed *Mario Party* series. And the N64 era also saw Mario return to his NES sporting roots in *Mario Golf* and *Mario Tennis*, before appearing in the first *Super Smash Bros* and making his final 'so long' for the console with *Paper Mario*.

Owing to the early release of *Mario 64* on the N64, it comes as a surprise to many that a sequel was never released on the system. Well, in actual fact, for a time a *Mario 64* sequel was in development, albeit for the 64DD. In 1997 Miyamoto revealed to E3 attendees that work had started on the game. However, following the disastrous launch of the add-on in Japan, and its subsequent poor domestic sales, Nintendo promptly stopped support for the hardware and the game was scrapped.

During Nintendo's Space World event in 2000, the company showcased the power of its brand new console, the GameCube, with a *Mario* tech demo dubbed *Super Mario 128*. The short demonstration showed a large 2D Mario splintering into 128 smaller versions that ran across the surface of a globe. It showcased, for the first time, the 'sphere-walking' tech that was to be later utilised for *Super Mario Galaxy*.

The following year, however, and at the same show, *Super Mario Sunshine* was unveiled to the crowds, and while it shared little likeness to *Super Mario 128*, it was formally announced as the official sequel to *Mario 64*. Apart from a story that saw Mario partaking in a spot of community service after the squeaky plumber is forced to clean up the mess left by a muck-spraying imposter, *Sunshine* stuck very close to *Mario 64*'s template.

Set in the sun-drenched Isle Delfino, *Sunshine* kept the popular hub structure of *Mario 64*, and progression still relied on the collection of Stars – now named Shine Sprites. As well as the 3D return of Yoshi, the most novel feature in *Sunshine* came in the form of an odd rucksack armament called FLUDD (Flash Liquidizing Ultra Dousing Device) that Mario could use not only as a cleaning weapon but also as a way to help get around the stages. Clever aiming of the FLUDD's spray nozzles

MARIO MEMORIES

Ste Pickford
Legendary 8-bit coder

Definitely *Donkey Kong* in Stockport Arcade, or maybe on holiday in Blackpool or Southport. Of course I never knew that was actually Mario at the time. I could never get past the second screen, but I must have spent dozens of 10ps trying. The first real introduction I had to Mario was at Rare. We had a meeting there in about 1988, and they showed us *Super Mario Bros* on a NES. We must have just screwed our faces up because of how ugly it looked. We were heavily into developing Amiga and Atari ST games at the time, and had sort of graduated from blocky four-colour graphics to higher-res 16-colour graphics with large, non-repeating bitmaps. The Stampers told us to ignore the fact that it didn't look that good, and insisted that we play it because it was better than any Amiga game. We laughed, but I think they lent us a NES with a couple of games, and sure enough, *Super Mario Bros* was brilliant. The irony is that the simple, functional graphics of *SMB* have dated much better than the over-worked Amiga graphics of the same period. Without a doubt my favourite Mario game is *Super Mario Bros 3*. We were developing NES games ourselves when it was released, and we were just blown away by how much better this game was than anything we were working on at the time. It was at that point that I first began to appreciate what a great designer Mr Miyamoto was, and what a great developer Nintendo is. They were streets ahead of everyone else in the world at that time. That game introduced so many new ideas, and had so much imagination – every new level was surprising and delightful. I don't think that level of consistent invention in one game has been matched by any game since, until *Super Mario Galaxy*, but *Super Mario Bros 3* wins for me because of the big impression it made on me when I was younger.

MARIO MEMORIES

Greg Omi
Atari Lynx progammer

I first saw Mario in *Donkey Kong*, but the first time I really recognised Mario was in *Super Mario Bros* for the Nintendo. I was working at Epyx at the time and the testers were playing it. That year I bought NES consoles for all of my nieces and nephews.

Mario Kart 64 is probably my favourite *Mario* game because it led us to make *Crash Team Racing*, which I consider to be the most fun game I've ever worked on. I loved the slide mechanics and the random power-ups to rubber band the gameplay, helping out the players in the back. Really good level design also. I love Wario Stadium with the unintentional short cut at the beginning of the track where you could jump over the wall twice to get a really low lap time.

Right place right time and branding. Mario came to represent Nintendo as a mascot because of the success of *Super Mario Bros*. This led Nintendo to market based on Mario, which increased his popularity. Popularity is a power function, so once you have brand recognition, you have inertia to give you a leg up on the competition. That's why everyone makes sequels, why movie companies try to make blockbuster movies, and why indies and original material have a hard time breaking through. Just look at social gaming: *FarmVille*, which I now work on, is twice as popular as the next most popular game; there are a bunch of games around second place, followed by the 'long tail' of games after that. There can only be one super popular game at a time, and at some point *FarmVille*'s popularity will fade and another game will rise to fill its spot. *World Of Warcraft* is another example of this.

» A landmark game for Mario, which set an unreachable benchmark for future 3D games to try to meet.

could launch Mario up into the air and even afford him a handy spray-powered speed boost. However, the device quickly became a bone of contention with many fans when they soon discovered that it hindered the responsive control of Mario, and made retrieving stars almost feel like Mario-endorsed GCSE physics exercises.

With *Mario Sunshine* failing to capture or stir up the same level of popularity as previous big-budget *Mario* titles, and it becoming increasing likely that the GameCube would become Nintendo's most unsuccessful console to date, outwardly it seemed that the once-infallible videogame giant was finally losing its grip on the market it formerly dominated, and Mario seemed to echo this sense of dispassion, appearing in a series of decent but uninspired sports sequels – *Mario Power Tennis*, *Mario Superstar Baseball* and *Mario Golf Toadstool Tour* – following a good but equally uninspired *Mario Kart* sequel with *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!*. But just as it seemed Nintendo was becoming crestfallen by its fall from greatness, the Wii happened and changed its fortunes in a way that nobody could have predicted.

» *Super Mario Sunshine* marked the first playable 3D appearance of Yoshi, as well as the first and, hopefully, last appearance of FLUDD.

"THIS INDUSTRY WOULD BE A FAR GLUMMER PLACE WITHOUT MARIO"

SPACE: THE FINEST FRONTIER

Both *Mario Galaxy* and *Mario Galaxy 2* stand as nigh-on flawless examples of expert game design, and rank among the best games in the *Mario* series. By making inspired and sensible use of the Wii's motion-sensor controls, Nintendo was able to recapture the keen sense of fun, exploration and enjoyment that dazzled gamers in *Mario 64*. Making use of the sphere-walking technology first demoed in *Super Mario 128*, Miyamoto and his team shot for the stars by opting to set the games in outer space, with levels taking the form of galaxies, all filled with individual planets and worlds to explore. Like *Mario 64* before it, the controls were also wonderfully implemented. Players could steer Mario in comfortable *Mario 64* fashion, but also aid him using the Wii Remote, which, through an on-screen reticule, could be used to suck up 'Star Bits' and launch Mario between planets. The *Galaxy* games also saw a return of the costume-style power-ups of old, including a bee costume that gave Mario the power of temporary flight, a spring suit to heighten his jump, and the first 3D iteration of the Fire Flower.

Complementing these two interstellar *Mario* adventures was another *Paper Mario* game, one of the best *Mario Kart* sequels to date in *Mario Kart Wii*, and a real return to the character's Famicom roots in the four-player platformer *New Super Mario Bros*, a game that brought simultaneous multiplayer back to the series for the first time since the original *Mario Bros*. And Nintendo's love for the past looks set to continue. Nintendo released a special *Super Mario Special Collection* for the Wii to celebrate the 25th anniversary, as well as *New Super Mario Bros* on DS.

Mario's adventures continued on Nintendo's next hardware releases with *New Super Mario Bros 2* and *Super Mario 3D Land* for Nintendo 3DS and the rather excellent *Super Mario 3D World* on Wii U. The Wii U got another surprise in the form of the brilliant *Super Mario Maker*, which allowed players to create their own Mario-themed levels and share them online. It was later released on 3DS. The eighth *Mario Kart* also made its debut on Wii U and introduced *F-Zero*-styled anti-gravity sections. So popular was it, Nintendo repackaged it for the Switch and included all its fantastic DLC tracks. Which brings us to *Super Mario Odyssey*, the latest critically acclaimed game. It appears Mario isn't going anywhere.

ANGEL LAND STORY

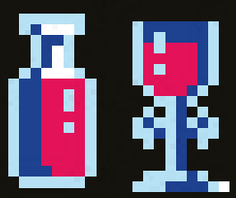
Kid Icarus

THE CLASSIC GAME

It's important to remember that not every Nintendo series finds instant success. This is a shame as it's meant that certain titles never received the love they deserved and *Kid Icarus* is a great example of this. Many people who've tried *Kid Icarus* just can't see what all the fuss is about but that's because many of them didn't play beyond the first few screens of Nintendo's classic game. Go deeper and you'll find it's just as wondrous and surprising as the big three NES games – *Mario*, *Zelda* and *Metroid* – and is more than deserving of its cult status. It's certainly not the easiest game to master, but once it clicks you'll wonder why you didn't love it sooner. *

The Chalice and Bottle

The Chalice and Bottle both refill life. The latter renews life automatically upon death.

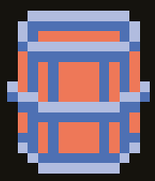


Hearts

Hearts aren't actually for health. They're a form of currency in *Kid Icarus*.

The Barrel

The Barrel allows you to carry up to five bottles at once.



Angel Feather

Fall down a hole while equipped with an Angel Feather and you'll float back up to safety.

The Flaming Arrow

The Flaming Arrow allows Pit to fire an extra harmful fireball but requires at least one full life block to use.

Magic Wand

This magic wand rotates two Protective Crystals around Pit.

The Strength Arrow

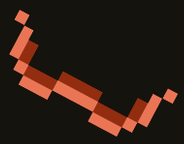
The Strength Arrow, uh, increases the strength of Pit's arrows.

Hammer

The limited-use Hammer can be used as a weapon but also frees Centurions from their statues so that they can help Pit in boss battles.

The Sacred Bow

The Sacred Bow extends the range of Pit's bow but requires at least two full life blocks to use.

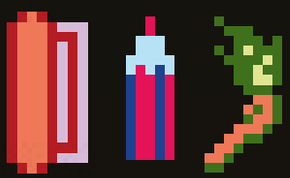


The Mirror Shield

You get the Mirror Shield towards the end of the game: it blocks enemy shots including those of final boss Medusa.

The Map, Torch and Pencil

The Map, Torch and Pencil are used to locate your position in labyrinths and mark off all rooms visited.



The Light Arrow

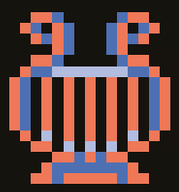
The Light Arrow is also found toward the end of the game and lets Pit shoot a laser across the screen.

Wings of Pegasus

The third and final treasure you're given for the final level is the Wings Of Pegasus, which allow Pit to fly.

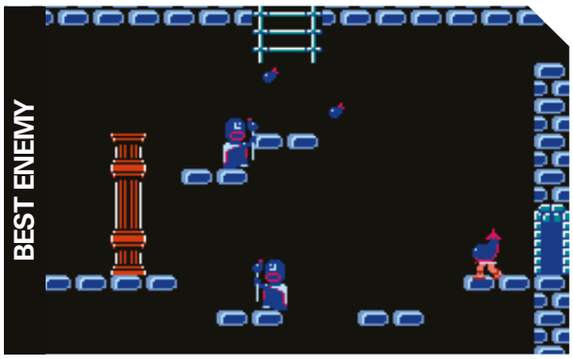
The Harp

Pick up the Harp and all enemies on-screen will turn into Hammers.



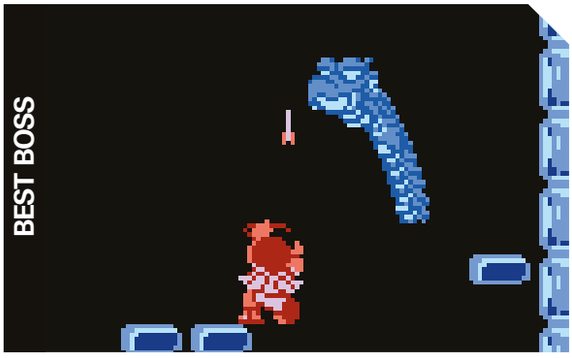
A true adventure

Kid Icarus might not have the same level of exposure as other Nintendo games like *Legend Of Zelda* and *Metroid* but it truly deserves to be mentioned in the same breath. Like both of those games, it's beloved because of the way it presents a world of possibility and adventure. It's a little more linear, admittedly, but new players will still venture into Pit's world with no idea of what to expect. There are so many surprises to find and rooms full of challenges to overcome that every discovery feels like a personal accomplishment. You'll never forget your first playthrough.



The Eggplant Wizard

Only Nintendo would have the imagination and the guts to make one of its toughest enemies a walking eggplant with a face. The Eggplant Wizard roams the dungeons of *Kid Icarus* and throws eggplants at Pit in such a way that they're pretty tricky to avoid. Get struck by one and Pit's head will also turn into an eggplant, which is pretty funny but very annoying since it renders him completely unable to use weapons unless he can find a nurse to heal him. Such dirty tricks lend *Kid Icarus* its reputation for difficulty but also add to that crucial feeling that anything can and will happen.

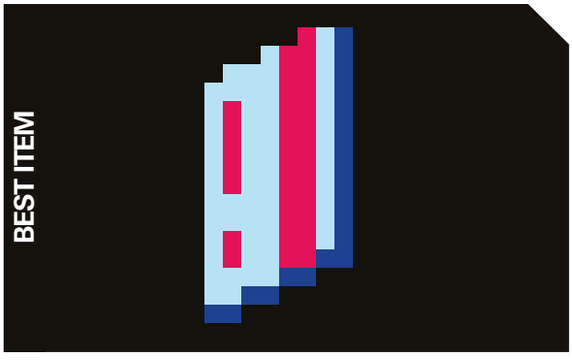


Hewdraw

There are only four bosses in the whole of *Kid Icarus* and, to be honest, they're all about as good as each other. If we *had* to pick one, then we'd go for this snaking dragon monster who bounces around a room filled with lava pits, making him the most difficult of the four bosses to defeat. And extra credit has to be given to Hewdraw's unusual name. Allegedly a mistranslation of Hydra in the *Kid Icarus* manual, it is paid homage to in 3DS's *Kid Icarus: Uprising*, which features a 3D re-interpretation of the boss complete with possibly accidental name.

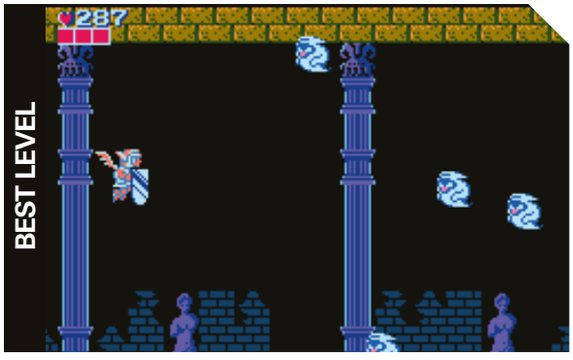
Buy somethin' will ya!

Part of *Kid Icarus*'s charm is the sheer number of secrets to find. Like *Mario* and *Zelda*, the game is packed with tons of secret passages, glitches to exploit and little tricks to give you an advantage. You could spend years working out some of these but we'll give you one to get going. When you reach a shopkeeper's room, plug a second controller into your NES and hit the A and B buttons. This will change the price of items. Though, beware, they don't always go down in value. This trick also won't work on the 3DS remake of *Kid Icarus*, for obvious reasons.



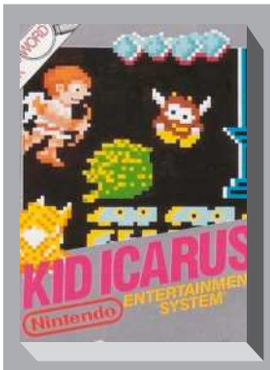
The credit card

There are tons of power-ups and collectible items in *Kid Icarus* and, unlike *Zelda* or *Metroid*, these items aren't necessary to clear the game. The beauty of this is that some are rarer than others and some have very precise, interesting uses. You could conceivably play through the whole game and still not see all of them. Our favourite? It *has* to be the credit card. This rare item allows you to buy items that you'd don't have enough hearts to afford but, cleverly, you'll then go into debt and have to collect more hearts later on to pay it off. A good life lesson to be learned there, we feel.



The Palace in the Sky

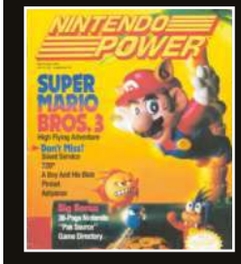
One of the reasons *Kid Icarus* is so underrated is that its extreme difficulty puts a lot of new players off and they give in before getting past the first few screens. That's a shame because it's beyond that opening vertical ascent that the game really gets interesting. It later opens up into more exploratory *Metroid*-style areas, and lavishes Pit with new powers and abilities. If you're skilled enough to get there then the fourth world, The Palace In The Sky is the highlight. It sees Pit don a winged suit of armour and turns into a sort of side-scrolling shoot-'em-up, epitomising *Kid Icarus*'s ability to never stay the same.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** NES
- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO R&D1
- **RELEASED:** 1987
- **GENRE:** ACTION-ADVENTURE

What the press said... ages ago



Nintendo Power

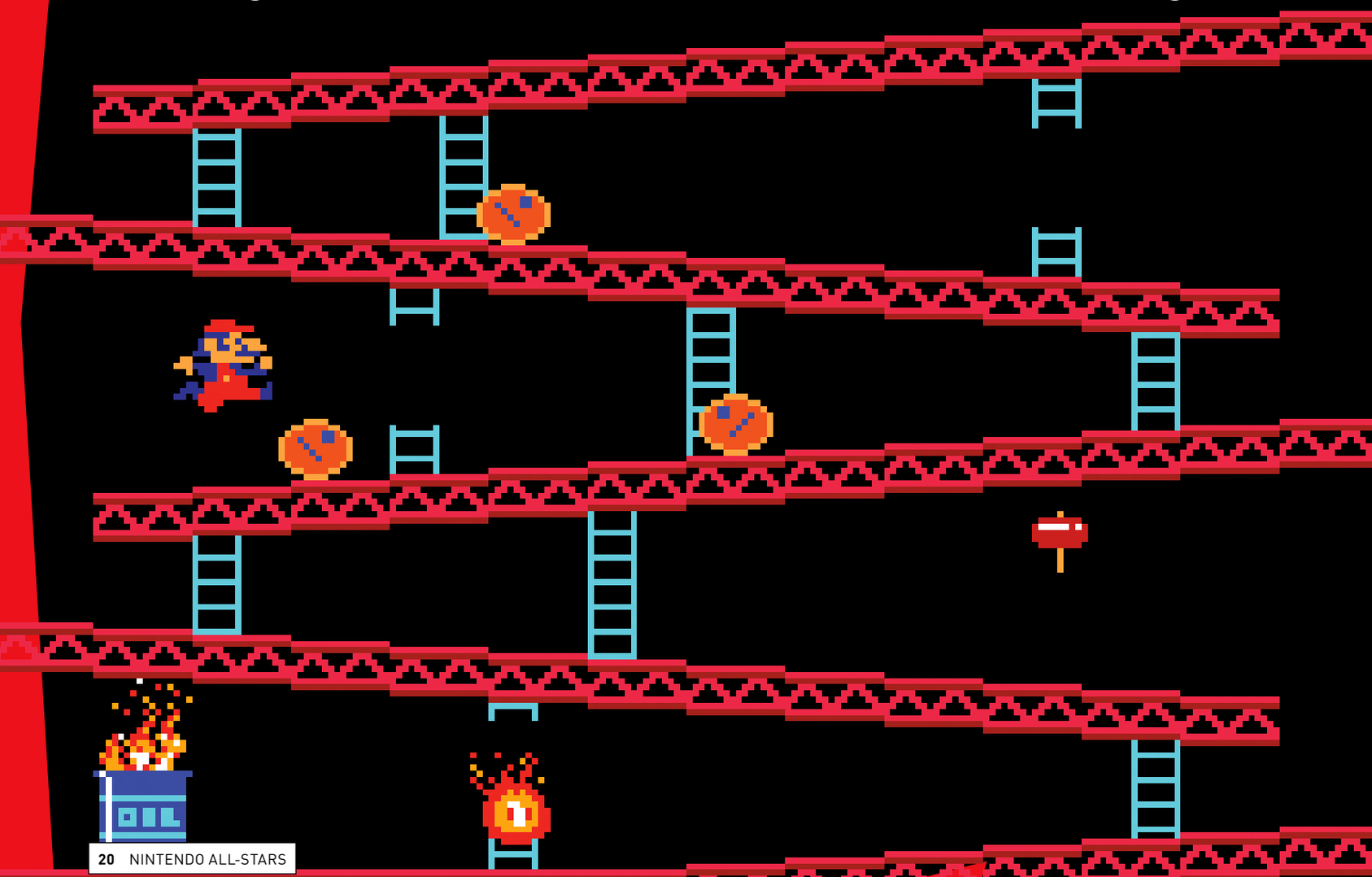
Kid Icarus was already a year old by the time *Nintendo Power* came into existence, so it was never reviewed. But its famous difficulty did prompt the magazine to print a player's guide with lots of handy passwords. "You might expect an adventure in a place called Angel Land to be rather tame," said *NP*. "That's not the case with *Kid Icarus*."

What we think

There's no denying that *Kid Icarus*'s difficulty can put people off. You could use some of those cheat codes to overcome that, but we'd recommend you play the 3D Classics edition of the game now available on the 3DS e-shop, as it's a little easier.

The history of DONKEY KONG

The portly plumber may have edged into mascot status for Nintendo, but Donkey Kong has always proved the resilient gaming-grunt, who could be called upon to pull off a victory when it mattered most. Stuart Hunt takes a look at the videogame's misread simian and Nintendo's hairy knight



Remember that entire series of *Dallas* that was controversially wiped away when the show's producers brought Bobby Ewing back to life? They explained his lack of rigor mortis was due to a long, drawn-out dream sequence by his hyper-imaginative wife. Consequently, all story, plot threads and character development that had stemmed from his untimely death were made redundant, and its viewers were left understandably miffed by the revelation.

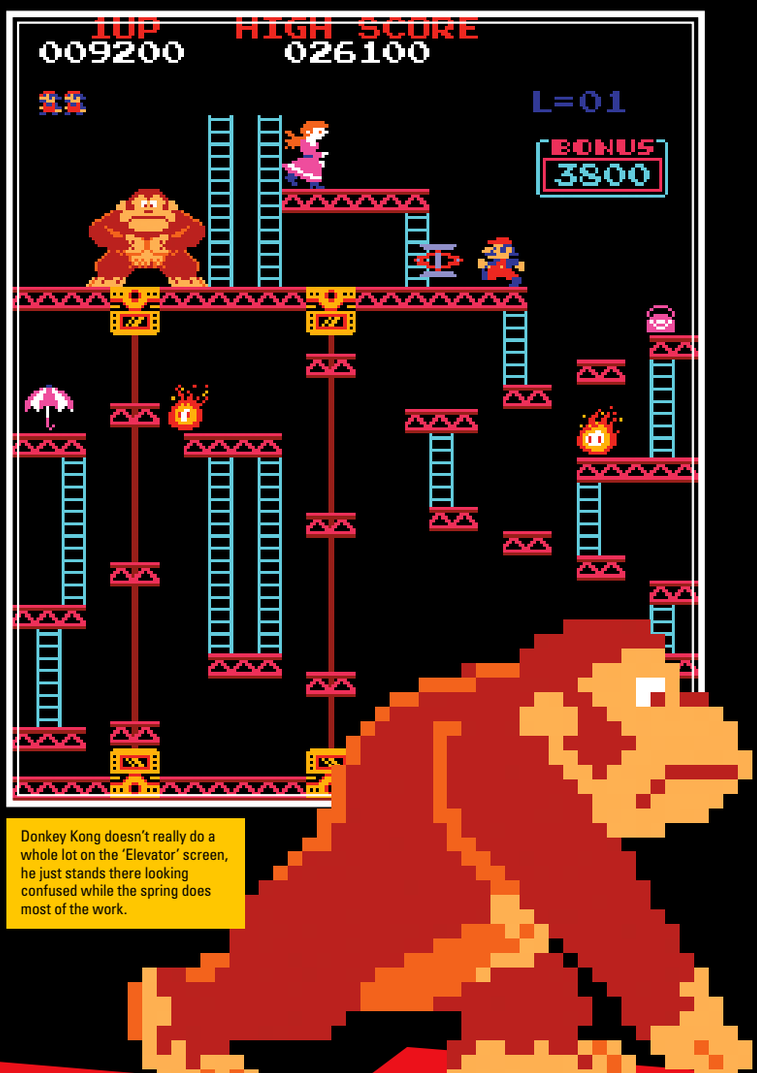
Okay, we digress, but like the *Dallas* scriptwriters, Nintendo has also been known to skip over the facts and move the goalposts on the odd occasion. It certainly feels like there's a pivotal link missing from its IP lineage, a lost game that never found a release; one that chronicled Mario's transition from an evil carpenter to a heroic plumber and explaining how Donkey Kong went from being a villainous ape to a loveable 20-foot beanie baby.

As confusing as this story eventually became, looking to the early days of *Donkey Kong*'s development for an anchor, instead tosses you an early arcade cab called *Radar Scope*. It was this very early *Space Invaders* clone that would trigger *Donkey Kong*'s genesis.

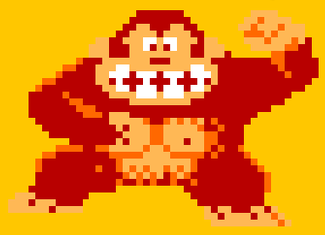
The Eighties shooter from Nintendo proved a big hit in its Eastern homeland and as a result, the then-president of Nintendo of America, Minoru Arakawa, happily agreed to place a considerable order for the machine to be distributed in America. As fate would have it, by the time *Radar Scope* touched down on American soil the buzz surrounding the game had waned considerably. US arcade operators were furious by the lack of earnings from the machine and aimed their anger towards Arakawa.

Facing financial ruin, Arakawa pleaded with his father-in-law (Nintendo CEO Hiroshi Yamauchi) to send him a new game that he could install into the *Radar Scope* cabinets and turn his ill fortune around. Yamauchi agreed and entrusted the job to a young aspiring industrial designer who was working for him, named Shigeru Miyamoto.

"When I started my career at Nintendo, there was no such thing as videogame making at the company," revealed Miyamoto in an interview with Talk Asia. "When I joined the company, I only wanted to be involved in making toys or entertainment products. Soon afterwards I came across videogames. But at the time, the company didn't make or sell them. My job was to draw



Donkey Kong doesn't really do a whole lot on the 'Elevator' screen, he just stands there looking confused while the spring does most of the work.



Donkey Kong A-Z

A is for Ape: Despite sharing half a moniker with a stubborn horse, the gorilla was the animal selected by Miyamoto to play the villain in his first videogame.

B is for Barrels: Rather than simply swinging down and eating Jumpman, Kong throws an infinite number of large barrels at his abusive master.

C is for Coleco: Coleco won the licensing rights to take *Donkey Kong* home.

D is for Diddy Kong: Donkey Kong's little cousin made his first appearance in *Donkey Kong Country*, and then rescued his hind in *Donkey Kong 2*.

E is for Everyman: This is the term coined for heroes like Jumpman – a generic guy that anyone who's ever tried to rescue their girlfriend from a giant ape could easily relate to.

F is for a Fistful Of Quarters: The documentary that follows two contesting *Donkey Kong* champs on a cross-country duel to see who is the real 'King of Kong.'

G is for Gunpei Yokoi: The notable Nintendo engineer was instrumental in bringing the big guy to life.

H is for 'How High Can You Try?': The grammar-dismissing message that appears in the arcade game. It was later switched to the rather dubious sounding 'How High Can You Get?'

I is for Imitations: One of the most replicated games ever, *Donkey Kong* fever created a wave of clones and giant-ape-related bandwagon jumping.

J is for Jumpman: Yes, we know it's Mario but, like all good messiahs, he was originally a carpenter with very distinctive facial hair.

K is for Kill Screen: Upon reaching Level 22, the game's timer goes loopy. Adding seconds, removing seconds, freezing seconds and then, eventually, killing you.

L is for Ladders: Without them *Donkey Kong* would be a rather short and uninteresting game.

M is for Mario Segali: Apparently the butter ball can thank a Nintendo landlord for his infamous moniker.

N is for Nintendo: Started out selling playing cards, then electronic toys, and then arcade games about big apes and carpenters.

O is for Orco the Killer Whale: Appears in *Donkey Kong Jungle Beat* and is the whale pal of Donkey Kong. She helps him uncover secrets in the game by smashing into walls.

P is for Pauline: Jumpman's girlfriend and hostage of Donkey Kong. Her original name was Lady, but it was later changed because it was deemed too obvious.

Q is for Q*Bert: Warren Davis's ball of nostrils teamed up with Donkey Kong for the animated show *Saturday Supercade*.

R is for Radar Scope: From the guts of this *Galaxian*/*Space Invaders* clone came the birth of *Donkey Kong*.

S is for Shigeru Miyamoto: The prolific game designer cut his teeth on *Donkey Kong* – a project that he based around the characters in the *Popeye* cartoons.

T is for Taj: Taj is the Arabian-looking elephant that aids Diddy Kong in his quest to thwart the evil Wizpig in *Diddy Kong Racing*.

U is for Universal Studios, Inc versus Nintendo Co, Ltd: MCA Universal took Nintendo to court over *Donkey Kong*'s passing resemblance to *King Kong*. Universal lost.

V is for Very Addictive: The game's simple gameplay made it immediately accessible and extremely hard to walk away from.

W is for Wrinkly Kong. The late wife of the original Donkey Kong, sadly passed away soon after *Donkey Kong Country 3*.

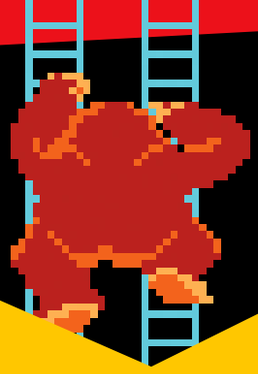
X is for X-Rated Action: After Mario rescues his beloved Pauline, they engage in some soppy giant-heart action.

Y is for Yamauchi: Yamauchi was the CEO of Nintendo at the time of *Donkey Kong*'s genesis. If it wasn't for him entrusting Miyamoto with the project, the industry might have looked somewhat different today.

Z is for Zelda: Thanks to the money raised by *Donkey Kong*, Nintendo would later go on to create the iconic RPG series.

The history of...

DONKEY KONG



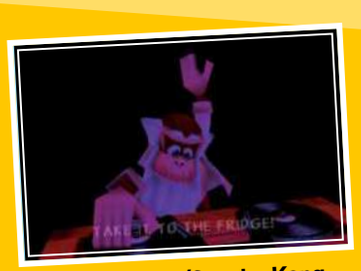
Donkey Kong Rap

THE BEGINNING OF DONKEY KONG 64 OPENS WITH THE INFAMOUS DONKEY KONG RAP. IT BASICALLY INTRODUCES THE MAIN CHARACTERS OF THE GAME, SHOWS OFF THEIR SPECIAL ABILITIES AND MAKES FOR SOME SIDE-SPLITTING HILARITY. HERE'S A COMPLETE WALKTHROUGH OF THE WHOLE SONG, WITH LYRICS... SHOULD YOU FEEL THE URGE TO SING ALONG...

"Here, here, here we go,
So they're finally here performing for you,
If you know the words you can join in too,
Put your hands together if you want to clap,
As we take you through this monkey rap,

Huh!!
DK, Donkey Kong!!

He's the leader of the bunch, you know him well,
He's finally back, to kick some tail,
His coconut gun can fire in spurts,
If he shoots ya, it's gonna hurt,
He's bigger, faster and stronger too,
He's the first member of the DK crew!"



Donkey Kong/Cranky Kong

FIRST APPEARANCE: DONKEY KONG

The original Kong flitted between villain and hero, and then became an eccentric geriatric for *Donkey Kong Country*. Opening and closing the rap is Cranky. He might look like he's about to keel over and die at any second, but if his scratching skills are anything to go by, this ape still got plenty of Palma Violets left in him.

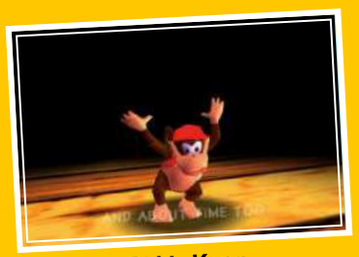
"**Huh!!**
DK, Donkey Kong!!
DK, Donkey Kong is here!!

This Kong's got style, so listen up dudes,
She can shrink in size to suit her mood,
She's quick and nimble when she needs to be,
She can float through the air and climb up trees,
If you choose her, you'll not choose wrong,
With a skip and a hop, she's one cool Kong!"

Chunky Kong

FIRST APPEARANCE: DONKEY KONG 64

Chunky's the older brother of Kiddy and cousin of Dixie and Tiny. As his name implies, he's no string bean. But despite his menacing frame, he's a bit of a wimp at heart; he hates heights, but who doesn't? After staring confusingly into the camera for a few seconds, he shrinks and expands his body in size.



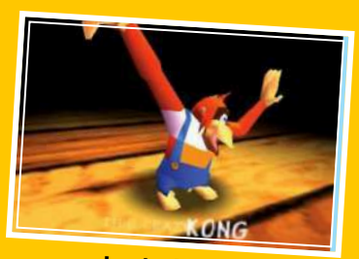
Diddy Kong

FIRST APPEARANCE: DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

Donkey Kong's nephew becomes his keen, dependable sidekick in *Donkey Kong Country*. He wears a red Nintendo cap and is rumoured to be showing his face in the upcoming *Super Smash Bros Brawl* on the Wii. After shooting up in the air with the aid of a precarious-looking wooden jetpack, he pulls out a colourful axe and proceeds to rock out.

"**Huh!!**
DK, Donkey Kong!!

He has no style, he has no grace,
This Kong has a funny face,
He can handstand when he needs to,
And stretch his arms out just for you,
Inflate himself just like a balloon,
This crazy Kong just digs this tune!"



Lanky Kong

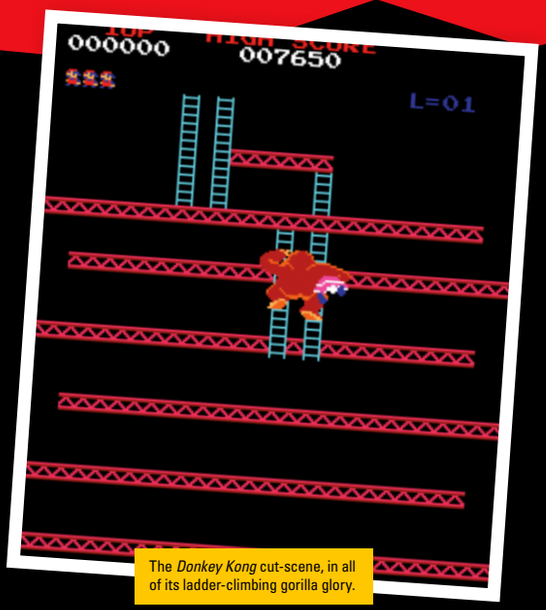
FIRST APPEARANCE: DONKEY KONG 64

Everyone has an odd-looking relative that's loosely related to them in some way but no one can ever remember how, and *Donkey Kong* is no different. Lanky Kong was heroically freed by Donkey Kong in *Donkey Kong 64*. In the rap, Lanky contorts his face into weird shapes and sizes before letting out a monumental display of flatulence. He consequently darts around the screen like a loon.

"**Huh!!**
DK, Donkey Kong!!
DK, Donkey Kong is here!!

He's back again and about time too,
And this time he's in the mood,
He can fly real high with his jetpack on,
With his pistols out
he's one tough Kong,
He'll make you smile
when he plays his tune,
But Kremlings beware
'cause he's after you!"

Picking up the mallet power-up sends Jumpman into a barrel-bashing frenzy that you can't shake him out of.



The *Donkey Kong* cut-scene, in all of its ladder-climbing gorilla glory.

pictures. I specialised in industrial design, so I was primarily drawing things to do with videogames or creating boxes for them."

Rather than update *Radar Scope*, Miyamoto set to work on designing a completely new game based around the machine's hardware. This would prove a pivotal move that would ultimately trigger Nintendo's prominence in the US arcade market.

At the time, most arcade games would require you to shoot at, or avoid, chirping sprites that disappeared faster than they had materialised. Taking inspiration from popular culture, Miyamoto decided that he would cling to the endearing love-triangle formula, used in the *Popeye* cartoons, to produce an arcade game that would emit character and playability. He set about designing characters to play three roles that he felt gamers would easily relate to: the hero (Jumpman), the damsel (Lady), and the bully (Donkey Kong).

Miyamoto's vision for Jumpman was an everyman-type character, a Joe Shmoe, someone the average gamer could relate to. Lady was a typical femme fatale, in the mould of a smouldering screen siren and Donkey Kong was the burly, misunderstood villain of the piece.

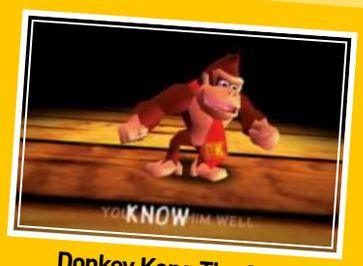
While many view Donkey Kong to be the monster of the tale, in a subtle nod to the classic *King Kong* story, Miyamoto's premise for the game isn't as black and white as it might first seem. The tale of how Jumpman finds himself coming to the rescue of Lady is one that will shatter the friendly façade of the world's most prolific plumber. Fed up of his maltreatment at the hands of his carpenter master, Donkey Kong breaks free from his cage and, as retribution, he kidnaps Jumpman's girlfriend.

With this 'damsel in distress' scenario in his head, Miyamoto approached legendary Nintendo technician Gunpei Yokoi with his idea. And with Miyamoto pencilling the concepts and Yokoi supervising the technical aspects of the project, together they brought the superlative scenario to fruition.

Miyamoto's fertile nature easily surpassed the technical confines of the time. His idea to make the characters react in different ways and to incorporate seesaws into the action were concepts that, sadly, had to remain inside his sketchbook. While these limitations kept tabs on his creativity, ironically, they became a huge factor in shaping the iconic look of Jumpman, who would later go on to become the world's most legendary videogame icon: Mario. In an interview with Talk Asia, Shigeru Miyamoto revealed how he settled on the iconic look of Mario.

"We had to draw Mario as a small character, and at the same time we had to make him look human," he explains. "To achieve that, we needed to draw distinctive features for him, such as giving him a big nose. We gave him a moustache so that we didn't need to draw a mouth, as it is often difficult to show facial expressions with small characters. We also gave him big hands. First, we created Mario with dots, and put together these distinctive features. Then I finished with another drawing, just to show the final image

> **Huh!!**
> **DK, Donkey Kong!!**
> **Huh!!**
>
> Finally he's here, he's here for you,
> It's the last member of the DK crew,
> This Kong's so strong,
> it isn't funny,
> He'll make a Kremling
> cry out for mummy,
> He can pick up a boulder
> with relative ease,
> Makes crushing rocks seem
> such a breeze,
> He may move slow,
> he can't jump high,
> But this Kong is one heck of a guy!

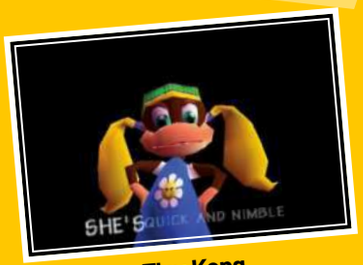


Donkey Kong The 2nd

FIRST APPEARANCE: DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

The 16-bit generation marked the arrival of a new Donkey Kong, sporting a dapper tie and posh new haircut. He's the grandson of Cranky Kong, and uncle to Diddy. He kicks off his part of the rap by doing some stretches, flexing his muscles and shooting some bees.

> **Huh!!**
>
> **C'mon Cranky take it to the fridge!**
>
> Walnuts, peanuts, pineapple smells,
> Grapes, melons, oranges
> and coconut shells,
> Walnuts, peanuts, pineapple smells,
> Grapes, melons, oranges
> and coconut shells,
>
> **Oh yeah!!**



Tiny Kong

FIRST APPEARANCE: DONKEY KONG 64

Dixie's sister made her first appearance in *Donkey Kong 64*. She's the tail-less sister to Dixie, and cousin to Chunky and Kiddy Kong. She's wears a beanie hat, sweat pants, and Pat Butcher-style earrings. For Tiny's chorus she punches a giant croc in the face and then runs around some palm trees.

HOLLYWOOD KONGA

HOW DONKEY KONG WENT TO THE MOVIES

Mario may have starred in his own Hollywood movie, and treated us to an hour-and-a-half long *Mario 3* advert in the form of the Fred Savage flick *The Wizard*, but *Donkey Kong* also achieved similar fame. Seth Gordon's movie: *The King Of Kong: A Fistful Of Quarters* was released in 2007 to critical acclaim.

After losing his job, Steve Wiebe sets about topping the *Donkey Kong* high-score record set by Floridian Billy Mitchell. After refining his barrel leaping and rivet removing, Steve eventually betters Billy's score and becomes a local hero. The film chronicles the pair's enmity, which comes to a nail-biting conclusion in a final cross-country duel.

'Let's get ready to Rumble Pak!"

The history of... DONKEY KONG

of the character. I didn't have any special theory behind the making of Mario. He evolved over the development process."

There are several theories as to how Miyamoto came to eventually settle on the name *Donkey Kong*. It's often cited that the original title was actually supposed to be '*Monkey Kong*,' but thanks to an over-zealous ink toner, causing a blurry fax to be sent by Nintendo, the 'M' was accidentally switched to a 'D'. But the real truth is that *Donkey Kong*'s name came down to one man: Shigeru Miyamoto, who confesses that he wanted to make his gorilla sound as stubborn and as stupid as possible. And so when thinking about animals that he deemed were mulish and dim-witted, the donkey popped into his head.

"For *Donkey Kong*, I wanted something to do with 'Kong' - a word which gives the idea of apes in Japanese. I came up with *Donkey Kong* because I heard that 'donkey' meant 'stupid'. Unfortunately, when I approached Nintendo of America with the name, nobody liked it. They said that it didn't mean 'Stupid Ape', but we went ahead with that name anyway."

It's widely regarded that *Donkey Kong* was the first game to ever introduce a cut-scene. In a pastiche to the Empire State Building ascent in *King Kong*, Donkey Kong climbs his way up to the top of a construction site, with Lady trapped brutishly under his arm. After perching her aloft the highest platform, he bends the iron girders beneath him by stomping on them, and sets the scene for our hero to make his rescue.

While most remember vividly the game's barrel-leaping level, it was praised for bringing multiple stages into its gameplay. *Donkey Kong* is split into four different sections, with each representing 25m of the total structure that Jumpman has to climb to rescue Lady. While late US versions of the game strangely work through the differing stages randomly, the original followed a logical configuration.

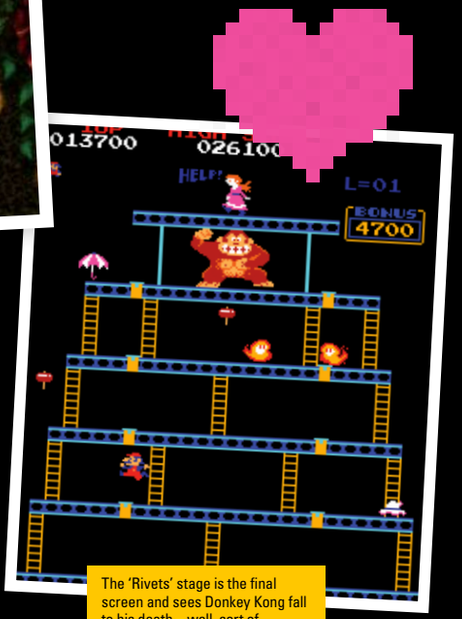
The first stage, commonly referred to as 'Girder', saw Jumpman climb a series of ladders, while avoiding barrels that Kong rolls along the platforms from the top of the screen. The second stage – nicknamed the 'Pie Factory' for its pie-like cement discs – saw Jumpman negotiate a series of conveyor belts, while avoiding deadly fireballs. The game's third stage, 'Elevator', was littered with moving lifts that had to be quickly negotiated before Jumpman became tangled up in their gears. The game's final screen 'Rivets' saw Jumpman knock out eight rivets that support an elevated Donkey Kong. Removing all of the supports caused the structure to collapse and Donkey Kong to fall on his head.

Donkey Kong Country allowed you to ride a rhino called Rambi. Is it any wonder it sold by the bucket loads?

When Kong is toppled the game repeats, looping between the differing four stages and increasing in difficulty until you reach the 22nd stage. It's here you meet its infamous 'kill screen'. A timer-glitch within the game meant it was impossible to progress further than the 22nd screen. When you reach this stage it loads up with 100 seconds on the game's clock, but when Jumpman eventually appears it wildly increases to 4,000 and begins counting down to 3,700, where it freezes and then kills him on the spot.

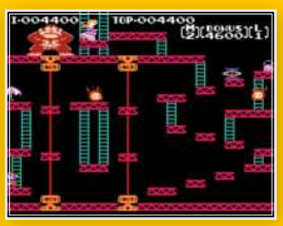
After seeing the finished game, Arakawa quickly called his son-in-law to tell him that Miyamoto had delivered him a title that he felt could eclipse the popularity of the *Radar Scope*. Nintendo's US distributors initially greeted *Donkey Kong*'s arrival to America with pessimism. They had their reservations regarding its unique gameplay and peculiar moniker, but Arakawa sternly disagreed and went forward with translating the game's story and renaming the characters for its Western cabinet artwork. Arakawa eventually settled on Pauline for Lady – named after the wife of a Nintendo warehouseman, and Mario for Jumpman, after Mario Segali, the landlord of Nintendo of America's headquarters.

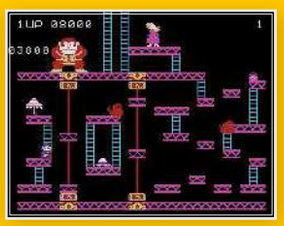
To test the water, two *Donkey Kong* machines were set up inside a Seattle bar, and its irresistible gameplay soon amassed quarters and fans in equal measure. Officially released in July 1981, demand for the machine spiralled in a month. Within a year Nintendo had sold 60,000 units, earning it a confounding $180 million. In its second year it raked in a further $100 million

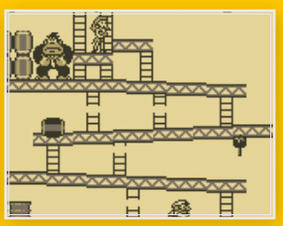


The 'Rivets' stage is the final screen and sees Donkey Kong fall to his death – well, sort of.

"Hey buddy, do you mind? We're trying to have one of those 'giant heart' moments."







NOTABLE KONGVERSIONS OF DONKEY KONG

ATARI 2600
Oh dear, it only has two of the four stages from the arcade game, and if you think those levels were omitted to help make the game look good, you'd be wrong. Mario looks pretty faithful, sporting moustache, flat cap and even sideburns. Donkey Kong, however, looks like Zippy from *Rainbow*. The game never ends either, it just keeps repeating its two screens until your Atari melts or you simply run out of lives.

NES
This NES classic was so popular that the cart remained in production for five years! Unfortunately, it wouldn't be an early *Donkey Kong* port without dropping stages from the arcade game, and the NES doesn't disappoint. Omitting the 'Pie Factory' level because of storage, and having slightly different sounds from the original, it might fail to offer the complete package, but it comes pretty darn close.

COLECOVISION
This fine home port came packed with the ColecoVision, so it could be considered one of the earliest examples of a killer app. It offers a pretty faithful port of the arcade, still boasting only three of the four stages, though (yep, no 'Pie Factory'). And despite an over-excessive use of the colour pink, and the fact Pauline is almost the same height as Donkey Kong, it looked and sounded remarkably faithful to the original.

INTELLIVISION
This port is marginally better than the Atari one. The first thing you notice is that Donkey Kong is green and Mario looks like Q*Bert. The game is hard to play, with Mario's jump only just clearing the enemies. Apparently, it looked so bad that when Mattel viewed it, it thought Coleco was intentionally trying to sabotage its machine. Coleco probably showed Mattel the ugly Atari port afterwards to soften the blow.

GAME BOY
More of a re-invention than a straight port, this *Donkey Kong* debut for the Game Boy was a strange Frankenstein of *Super Mario Bros* and the original *Donkey Kong* arcade game. The first four levels followed the order of the arcade game, but after Kong hits the ground with a thud, he re-awakens, grabs Pauline and escapes, leaving Mario to chase him through nine worlds of *Super Mario*-style platforming action.

and the game had become an impressive phenomenon.

By the end of 1982 Donkey Kong's hairy face could be seen on board games, cereal boxes and even in his own cartoon. With Donkey Kong becoming such a profitable icon, it was inevitable that the rights to release a home-conversion would be hotly contested. Taito, Atari and Coleco would lock horns in a bitter battle to secure the console rights to the game, and it was Coleco who would eventually emerge the victor. Yamauchi granted Coleco complete exclusivity to the home and table-top conversion of the franchise, and in return Nintendo received an undisclosed sum and a share in all cartridge sales. The contract was signed on 1 February 1982, and work on porting the arcade smash began rapidly.

Within four months, Coleco's home conversion was complete. It had stayed remarkably faithful to the original arcade game. Rather than release the game as a standalone cart, Coleco bundled the game with its ColecoVision console. It would later create versions of the game for Atari's 2600 and Mattel's Intellivision, in deals that would see its sales figures further skyrocket.

However, the air was soon to turn sour. Coleco, Nintendo and *Donkey Kong* were threatened by court action by Universal Studios, who proclaimed that the character of Donkey Kong was a blatant forgery of its stop-motion classic *King Kong*. Coleco settled with Universal out of court, but Nintendo was adamant that no infringement existed and went on to fight the case.

A catty battle ensued, but the case eventually fell through. It was discovered that Universal had successfully won a previous court battle to establish that *King Kong* was within the public domain, and so, could be used for the company's movie. The judge ruled in favour of Nintendo, and after an appeal, which was later quashed, Universal was forced to pay $1.8 million in damages to the videogame giant. It was the perfect result for Nintendo, but unfortunately Universal had already earned millions of dollars from the sale of Coleco's *Donkey Kong* carts. Coleco would later reclaim some of that money by counter-suing Universal.

As a gesture of gratitude, Nintendo presented its lawyer, John Kirby, with his own sailboat, which had been jokingly named the Donkey Kong. The company also gave him the exclusive worldwide rights to use the Donkey Kong moniker to manufacture a range of Donkey Kong sailboats. It has also been claimed that the character of Kirby was named after John Kirby, in honour of him winning the case.

With the popularity of *Donkey Kong* swathing the air like a potent jungle fever, Miyamoto quickly got to work on an arcade sequel. Probably as a result of *Donkey Kong*'s unprecedented popularity, for his second instalment, *Donkey Kong Jr*, he muddied up the three central roles. He made Donkey Kong the 'damsel in distress', Mario the eponymous villain and the role of hero fell to the knuckles of Donkey Kong's son, Junior.

Retaining the simple platform formula, it found Junior swinging from vines, avoiding bear traps with piranha qualities and collecting fruit across four varying stages that would loop and increase in difficulty. Mimicking the original, you would complete each stage by reaching the top of the screen where Mario had Donkey Kong chained in shackles. While the game proved to be a popular

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

Cameo Appearances

WE TAKE A LOOK AT SOME OF THE FINEST CAMEOS AND PECULIAR TITLES THAT DONKEY KONG HAS PUT HIS NAME TO...

MARIO PARTY
Released: 1998
System: N64
The Nintendo squad play animated pieces in an interactive board game. *Mario Party* spawned eight sequels (and seven of those managed to somehow stretch over two consoles). The aim was to obtain as many gold stars as possible by winning in the various mini-games that were dished up. Unlike *Mario Kart*, the characters didn't really differ in attributes, so as far as cameos go, this series was an easy one for Donkey Kong – he just had to turn up and look ape-like.

DONKEY KONG 3
Released: 1986
Systems: Arcade, NES, GBA, PC-88
This strange platform/shooter puts Donkey Kong back into the role of the villainous ape and you inside the pants of Stanley the Bugman. Using a can of Raid, you had to help Stanley protect his flowers by spraying angry bees in the face. Donkey Kong would occasionally drop projectiles at you from the top of the screen, and when you found a spare second, you had to hop onto the higher platforms and repel him with a quick, sharp spray to progress on to the next stage.

DONKEY KONG JR MATH
Released: 1983
Systems: NES, Virtual Console
Donkey Kong would hold up a number, and you would climb up vines to collect numbers and operators to make an equation that could equal that number. If you managed to get the equation correct, you were awarded an apple (shouldn't that have been a banana?). It's certainly a novel way of helping children improve their maths skills, but unfortunately, as with anything you attach the word 'math' to, it soon becomes as enjoyable as circling the full stops in a newspaper with an empty pen.

DONKEY KONG HOCKEY
Released: 1984
Systems: LCD
This one has to get a mention. It tops *Donkey Kong Jr Math* for sheer randomness. It's an early portable game released by Nintendo that saw Mario and Donkey Kong take to the ice and fight on opposing hockey teams. The peculiar portable came packed with two circular control pads that stemmed out from its sides. It allowed for some exciting, if somewhat cramped, two-player LCD hockey action. Many thanks to Steven Read from Miniarcade.com for helping us with the image.

DONKEY KONGA
Released: 2003
Systems: GameCube
Developed by the team responsible for the popular *Taiko Drum Master* games on the PS2, this rhythm-action game had you matching the beats on screen using a set of bongos. Its success would generate two sequels, the second of which, *Donkey Konga 3*, was only released in Japan. However, the game is worth tracking down for its track listing alone, which is teeming with retro-arcade sounds, including *Metro-Cross* and *Final Lap*.

Miyamoto set to work designing Donkey Kong. A pivotal move that would trigger Nintendo's prominence in the US market

The history of... DONKEY KONG

Donkey Kong's irresistible gameplay soon amassed quarters and fans in equal measure

KARTOON KAPER

After seeing the floods of quarters that the videogame industry was bringing in, US television giant, CBS, decided to get in on the action by commissioning *Saturday Supercade*: a cartoon collaboration of popular videogame characters. It pureed Frogger, Pitfall Harry and Q*Bert into generic cartoon capers that would see them solving mysteries, dishing out morals, or, in poor Donkey Kong's case, facing a life of circus imprisonment. Each episode involved a constantly smiling Donkey Kong escaping from Mario and his niece Pauline (yes, that would make her Luigi's daughter), by thinking up 20 head-slapping methods of absconding (one even included using a shark as a jet-ski).

sequel, it failed to imitate the same level of success that *Donkey Kong* had reaped the previous year.

Within two years, *Donkey Kong* had created an influx of bandwagon bootlegs. In response to the game's popularity, Sega published a strange *Donkey Kong* clone called *Congo Bongo*. Developed by audiovisual manufacturer Ikegami Tsushinki, its isometric perspective might have looked poles apart from *Donkey Kong*, but it was undeniably based on Nintendo's concept. *Congo Bongo*'s humorous plot found the protagonist perusing a giant ape not for wealth, fortune or love, but in revenge for a dangerous 'practical joke' that involved the ape setting fire to his tent while he was sleeping. While the game easily eclipsed *Donkey Kong* in the ridiculous story stakes, it unfortunately couldn't measure up to its commercial success.

While 1983 proved a prolific period for Nintendo and *Donkey Kong*, unfortunately, the same couldn't be said for the US videogame market. The Nintendo Famicom was about to launch in Japan, Miyamoto was about to release another *Donkey Kong* arcade game and the bottom of the videogame market in North America was about to well and truly drop out.

Donkey Kong 3 saw a strange departure from Miyamoto's previous *Donkey Kong* games. There was no Mario, no Pauline, and no simian-sibling. Its peculiar plot centred on Donkey Kong's love for greenhouse vandalism. After breaking into Stanley the Bugman's greenhouse, Donkey Kong clings to its rafters and narks off several bees by impolitely punching their hives. The miffed bees fly out and, upon noticing Donkey Kong's large frame, they opt to take their anger out on Stanley's prized begonias. Armed with a can of insecticide, you had to help Stanley eradicate the airborne-pests and scare Donkey Kong away before the bees flew to the bottom of the screen and massacred his flowers.

Perhaps, due to its stark change in gameplay, *Donkey Kong 3* failed to mirror the success of its two arcade cohorts, and Nintendo soon turned its attention towards the Famicom. Arcade ports of *Donkey Kong* and *Donkey Kong Jr* would make up two of the three launch games for the console. The Famicom would also mark the first straight-to-console outing for *Donkey Kong*, in a game that probably had many of the series' fans scratching their heads in bafflement.

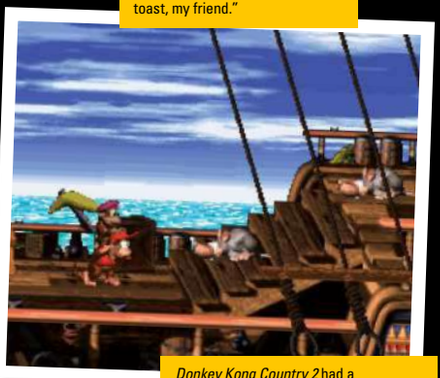
Nintendo felt the need to release an 'education series' for its console, and believed that Donkey Kong was the best character to champion its unusual arithmetic tutor, *Donkey Kong Jr Math*. The game is as crazy and as exciting as its title suggests. Reprising the role of Junior, the player must climb up vines and collect numbers and operators to equal the number that Donkey Kong holds up in the air. There were three modes of play in the game, one of which included a two-player option that allowed two friends to battle it out Countdown-style to win some digital apples. *Donkey Kong Jr Math* was released in Japan in 1983 and would later become a launch game for the Famicom when it was released in the United States two years later.

It would be a decade before *Donkey Kong* would escape again. In 1994, Miyamoto would release a strange *Super Mario/Donkey Kong* hybrid for the Game Boy. Using the confusing title of *Donkey Kong*, fans of the original arcade game hoping for a faithful monochrome reproduction would be disappointed. While the game retained the first four levels from the original, a Mario with a super back-flip jump that rendered the ladders useless, and the odd ability to catch barrels using his feet, meant the game was a bit of a pointless episode. It proved a popular title for the handheld, nonetheless, and also marked the first appearance of Donkey Kong's tie, which, from that point, would become obligatory for the franchise.

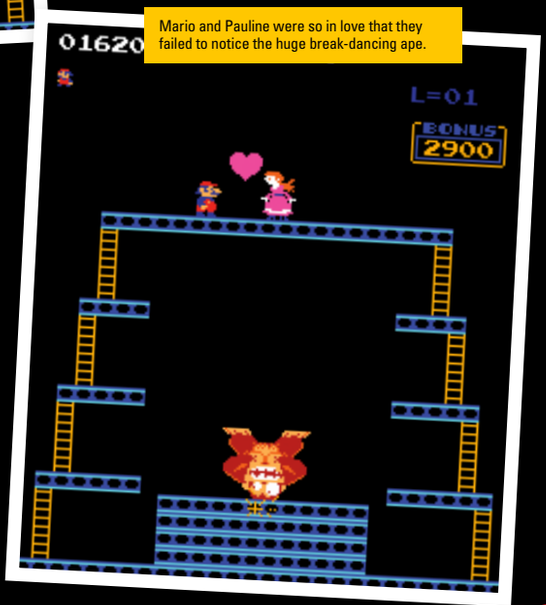
Over time, the Super Nintendo had eventually mirrored the popularity of the NES. Nintendo had gone through a stage of dusting off all its old IPs and giving them a 16-bit make over. *Metroid*, *Mario* and *Zelda* had proved extremely successful titles for the console, but the industry was being dazzled by the visual leap that 32-bit software had taken. The Saturn and PlayStation were wowing the industry with solid, realistic, 3D models that made 2D adventures look dated by comparison. Nintendo needed a strong title to inject interest back into the SNES, and it believed *Donkey Kong* could be the ape to do it.

Nintendo handed the reins to Rare, and Chris Stamper and his team set about transforming the archaic-looking arcade game into one of the most dazzling SNES titles ever (see our Making Of on page 68). Rare had recently taken a huge financial gamble by purchasing several 3D graphic terminals from Silicon Graphics. These machines allowed them to create beautiful pre-rendered 3D characters capable of inhibiting depth and fluidity. The company named this technology ACM (Advanced Character Modelling), and would unveil this ground-breaking development process with *Donkey Kong Country*. This would mark the first time that Miyamoto would not be involved in a *Donkey Kong* project.

"I don't know what you're smiling about, one more rivet and you're toast, my friend."



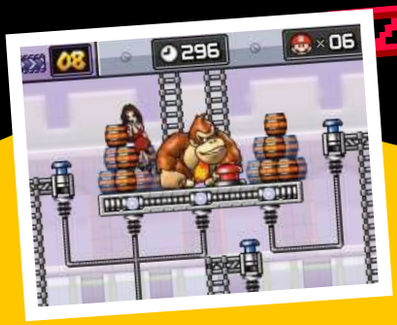
Donkey Kong Country 2 had a swashbuckling theme to it, and allowed you to throw your buddy into giant rats.



Mario and Pauline were so in love that they failed to notice the huge break-dancing ape.

KRAZY KOPY

Of the plentiful *Donkey Kong* clones that appeared after its release, *Crazy Kong* is one of the better to have emerged. Developed by Falcon, it was based around the hardware of Nichibutsu's *Crazy Climber* arcade game. Released the same year as *Donkey Kong*, it looks remarkably similar to the Nintendo classic. In fact, it's so alike that Nintendo went on to stop Falcon from releasing the game in the United States. Subsequently, in certain parts of Europe, *Krazy Kong* would actually become more popular than *Donkey Kong*. The clearest distinction between the two games is the different order in which the stages appear. Also, Falcon's Kong actually looks capable of foaming at the mouth, ditching the barrels and eating you.



HANDHELD KONG FUN

Donkey Kong continued to have a number of fun adventures on Nintendo's later handhelds, so let's cover them here. He made his debut on the Game Boy Advance in 2004 with *Mario Vs Donkey Kong* and quickly followed it up the same year with Paon's quirky *DK: King Of Swing*. Both games received sequels on Nintendo's DS in 2006 in the form of *March Of The Minis* and *DK Jungle Climber*, while a third DS game arrived in 2010 and was called *Mario Vs Donkey Kong: Mini-Land Mayhem*. Nintendo also ported *Donkey Kong Country Returns* to its 3DS in 2013, while the last game in the *Vs* series was *Tipping Stars*, which was released exclusively for the Nintendo 3DS in 2015.

Donkey Kong Jr. saw a slight tweak in the *Donkey Kong* gameplay.

This is how the US flag would have looked had it incorporated two monkeys hanging from a rope.

Donkey Kong Country was markedly different in gameplay from previous *Donkey Kong* outings. Sporting a smart red tie and a twirly haircut, a new dynamic Donkey Kong (grandson to the pioneering Kong) was let loose inside a vast, side-scrolling gaming reserve. Aided by his nephew Diddy Kong, in typical 'run-and-jump' fashion, they had to collect bananas, stomp on heads to defeat the evil King K Rool and his band of Kremlings. The game introduced a number of features that helped it stand out from other platform games, and a number of new Kongs into the *Donkey Kong* series, too. The game made use of a unique tagging system, which allowed you to switch between Donkey Kong and Diddy Kong at any point during the action, and it also saw the duo jumping onto the backs of their animal friends and using their vibrant jungle surrounding to great effect.

When the game was finally unveiled at the Summer Consumer Electronics Show in 1994, many of the attendees were left dumbfounded by the fact that the game was running on a humble SNES. Selling over eight-million copies, it went on to become one of the biggest-selling 16-bit games of all time.

Donkey Kong Country would later span two further SNES sequels. The second game, *Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy's Kong Quest*, chronicled Donkey Kong's capture at the hands of King K Rool and the rescue effort by Diddy and his sister Dixie. Rare tweaked the gameplay by introducing a number of new features into the game. It adapted the decisive 'buddy' system to allow you to hit enemies and reach inaccessible areas using the other character. It also introduced Easter eggs and secrets that would require meticulous scavenging and increase the game's longevity.

The third and final game in the *Donkey Kong Country* series, *Donkey Kong Country 3: Dixie Kong's Double Trouble*, was released in 1996. This time it was Diddy and Donkey Kong who would be held captive by the Kremlings (these Kongs should really start reading up on Stockholm Syndrome). With Dixie and little brother Kiddy Kong supplanted in the lead roles, the third adventure introduced side quests and a greater need for exploration. But, considering the huge inaugural leaps in gameplay that the first two games had taken, it felt like a lacklustre farewell to the Super Nintendo – a sentiment reflected in its reviews and sales.

Nintendo was late to enter the 32-bit arena, and as a result its new console became a bit of a 64-bit stopgap. Rare had proved instrumental in helping the N64 achieve early commercial success with its titles Blast Corps, GoldenEye and Banjo-Kazooie, and having demonstrated its technical flair by squeezing whatever juice was left from inside the ageing Super Nintendo, the company was once again handed the responsibility of *Donkey Kong* by Nintendo.

Ironically, a new console marked yet another new direction for the series. *Diddy Kong Racing* was Rare's turn at the *Mario Kart*-racer. Its unique mix of racing and adventure ran rings around the *Mario Kart 64*'s short life span, and it soon edged in front of the prolific karting classic.

In 1999, Rare's Gregg Mayles would spearhead *Donkey Kong*'s eventual platform transition to the N64. Utilising the *Banjo-Kazooie* engine, *Donkey Kong 64* was a sprawling adventure that was so huge that it came bundled with an extra 4MB of RAM. Coincidentally, it would be the first title to make use of the N64 expansion pack, and special editions of the game would be packed in banana-yellow cartridges. The game's plot centred on more Kong abductions and even more banana collecting, it introduced further apes into the franchise and its electric intro would be the first time we ever got to hear the peculiar Donkey Kong Rap. The game was greeted with mixed reviews by the press. Some argued that the game felt too similar to *Banjo-Kazooie*, others thought that it failed to pack the same punch as *Donkey Kong*'s Super Nintendo debut. Regardless, the title proved popular and became widely considered as a popular appendage to the *Donkey Kong Country* series.

In 2002, as a result of a record-breaking $377 million acquisition by Microsoft, Rare would no longer be an exclusive developer for Nintendo. This deal would spell the end of the planned GameCube racer, *Donkey Kong Racing* – the highly anticipated follow-up to *Diddy Kong Racing*. A video of the running game was exhibited at E3 in 2001, featuring Donkey Kong and friends racing on the back of their animal friends. This cancelled project led many to feel that the future of *Donkey Kong* could be in jeopardy.

However, he was to make a noisy re-emergence in 2004, with the most peculiar genre-dip in the franchise to date. Developed by Namco, *Donkey Konga* was a quirky game that retained the *Donkey Kong Country* 'look' that Rare had infused into the series. It allowed gamers to test their mettle on a set of plastic bongos, and keep the beat to a playlist of classic gaming gems. Favourable reviews and brisk sales would see the series spawn two sequels, with the latter only getting a Japanese release.

Donkey Kong would finally return home in 2005 for *Donkey Kong Jungle Beat* on the GameCube. Developed by Nintendo's EAD (Entertainment Analysis and Development) department, the final *Donkey Kong* caper on the GameCube was a unique platform adventure that borrowed rhythmic elements from *Donkey Konga*. Hitting the left and right bongos moved Donkey Kong in the corresponding direction, through his beautiful, animated world. It also introduced a unique combo system that would appeal to high-score chasers, and give the game immense longevity.

Nintendo's popular character soon shifted consoles again, this time to the Wii, but the initial results where nowhere near as impressive. *Donkey Kong Barrel Blast* was a disappointing offering that received poor scores and sales when it was released in 2007. Shortly afterwards, Retro Studios was tasked with creating a proper platformer for the popular ape. It turned out to be the right call, as *Donkey Kong Country Returns* was a fantastic release that featured excellent visuals and lots of neat gameplay mechanics when it appeared in 2010. It proved so popular that a sequel followed for the Wii U in the form of *Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze*, which in turn was later ported to Nintendo's Switch.

It's certainly been an interesting life for *Donkey Kong*, and trying to confine the series to one particular genre has proved impossible. From softening the *Radar Scope* backlash, to bankrolling the Famicom, *Donkey Kong* has always played a key role in Nintendo's history. It was the title that launched the company, and first introduced the world to Mario. It's a pivotal game for Nintendo, and a special one for Shigeru Miyamoto as he told Talk Asia in 2007.

"I like all the games that I've worked on so it's really hard to pick one, but I guess, because of its impact, and because I started it at a time when there wasn't even anything called 'game design', I guess it would have to be *Donkey Kong*. It was from there that I chose the path that I took and went from a simple industrial designer to a 'game design specialist'."

SUPER SMA

Where else do you get to see Luigi take revenge on Mario after years of living in his shadow, or see Captain Falcon fighting for his life against a horde of Yoshis? Luke Albigés wave-dashes back to the party fighter that evolved into a tournament sensation

» It's fun to charge in and bust out your best moves, but it makes more tactical sense to hold back and let others wear themselves out.

ASH BROS.

The core concept of *Smash Bros.* is pretty much as old as time itself. It's the classic power struggle; it's 'my dad is bigger than yours'; it's those playground arguments about who would win in a fight between Batman and Lion-O. But more than that, it's a celebration – proof if proof be needed that Nintendo's family of familiar faces is the best in the business. Today one of the most popular competitive fighting games in the world (player count across *Melee* and the new game at Evo 2016, the world's leading fighting game tourney, fell only just shy of front-runner *Street Fighter V*), it's amazing to return to *Smash*'s humble beginnings and remember just how barebones the experience used to be.

Fire up the Wii U game and you're greeted with an daunting amount of choice. From packed menus that seem to go on forever to a character select screen that only gets even more ridiculous as you add to its vast selection of fighters through general play, you never feel like you've seen everything the game has to offer. That cannot be said of the original game, with its eight core fighters and limited modes, but the comparison is hardly fair – this is a pattern seen consistently throughout the history of the genre. *Street Fighter*'s roster of playable characters has swelled from eight in *Street Fighter II* to 44 in *Ultra Sreet Fighter IV, X-Men Vs. Street Fighter* had just 17 to *Marvel Vs Capcom 2*'s 56, *Mortal Kombat* had only seven characters on its inception… in comparison, *Smash*'s cast of 12 fighters (four of whom are locked until certain criteria are met) looks positively healthy.

Better yet, there's very little fat on the roster. With the exception of Luigi (who, as you might expect, ▶

KEY SEQUELS ...and the characters that joined the fray

SUPER SMASH BROS. MELEE

GAMECUBE, 2001

■ Widely regarded as the best game in the series and still played competitively to this day, *Melee* more than doubled the character count and went to town with new modes, options, stages and references. Refined controls led to some complex techniques that make high-level play incredible to watch – anyone who considers *Smash* to be a button-mashing party game would do well to check out some pro matches to see the *real Smash* in action.

NEWCOMERS

Bowser [Mario]
Dr. Mario [Mario]
Falco [Star Fox]
Ganondorf [Zelda]
Ice Climbers [Ice Climbers]
Marth [Fire Emblem]
Mewtwo [Pokémon]
Mr. Game And Watch [Game And Watch]
Peach [Mario]
Pichu [Pokémon]
Roy [Fire Emblem]
Sheik [Zelda]
Young Link [Zelda]
Zelda [Zelda]

SUPER SMASH BROS. BRAWL

WII, 2008

■ As well as another massive serving of cool new content, *Brawl* also brought with it *Smash*'s most controversial feature to date. Tripping, where characters had a slight chance of falling over when initiating a dash, added an unnecessary random element into what was proving to be an increasingly technical game, and most competitive circles ended up sticking with *Melee* instead of risking losing high-profile matches after pratfalling.

NEWCOMERS

Diddy Kong [Donkey Kong]
Ike [Fire Emblem]
King Dedede [Kirby]
Lucario [Pokémon]
Lucas [Mother]
Meta Knight [Kirby]
Olimar [Pikmin]
Pit [Kid Icarus]
Pokémon Trainer [Pokémon]
R.O.B. [Nintendo]
Snake [Metal Gear]
Sonic [Sonic]
Toon Link [Zelda]
Wario [Mario]
Wolf [Star Fox]
Zero Suit Samus [Metroid]

SUPER SMASH BROS. FOR 3DS

3DS, 2014

■ This duo of releases is largely similar in terms of content, with the handheld version getting out of the gates slightly ahead of its home console counterpart. Exclusive to the 3DS release, Smash Run mode sees players explore a large level while building their stats, with a random match or challenge taking place at the end.

SUPER SMASH BROS. FOR WII U

WII U, 2014

■ The main event followed a few months after its 3DS stablemate's release, with loads of additional content – the board game-esque Smash Tour mode, a chaotic eight-player mode, the trials of Special Orders and Event modes and the freedom of the stage builder are all exclusive to the home version. There's also DLC characters aplenty, including Ryu and *FFVII*'s Cloud.

NEWCOMERS

Bayonetta [Bayonetta]
Bowser Jr. [Mario]
Cloud [Final Fantasy]
Corrin [Fire Emblem]
Dark Pit [Kid Icarus]
Duck Hunt Duo [Duck Hunt]
Greninja [Pokémon]
Little Mac [Punch-Out!!]
Lucina [Fire Emblem]
Mega Man [Mega Man]
Mii Fighter [Nintendo]
Pac-Man [Pac-Man]
Palutena [Fire Emblem]
Robin [Fire Emblem]
Rosalina & Luma [Mario]
Ryu [Street Fighter]
Shulk [Xenoblade]
Villager [Animal Crossing]
Wii Fit Trainer [Wii Fit]

plays almost exactly like Mario), every character has their own distinct feel and playstyle. At one end of the spectrum sits Donkey Kong, a heavy and hard-hitting option for those who don't like to mess around when it comes to dealing damage, while at the other is Fox, who relies on little-and-often damage as he darts around opponents. There are agile options who can recover well, characters who do better at range than up close and everything in between – for so small a roster, there's a great degree of variety on offer. This extends to the settings as well, with stages based on every major series represented each boasting their own feel and array of options. From the rising hazards of the *Metroid* stage to the angles of Sector Z's moving ships and Arwings, where you choose to fight is just as important as who you choose to fight with. If in doubt, just plump for the Kirby stage – it has the best music and, given that competitive staples Battlefield and Final Destination are only available in single-player here, it's hands-down the most level playing field for any given match-up.

If you even want to play fair, that is – the real joy of *Smash Bros.* is found in its versatility, letting you play the way you choose. By default, items will appear or fall into the stage periodically to spice up the battle, both the nature and frequency of these eventually fully customisable. Like the stages and stars, most of these are nods to classic Nintendo games or power-ups – something taken further still by the Assist Trophies in later games, which call in cameos from even more famous characters – and you can get your hands on everything from Poké Balls that unleash random monsters to the hammer that helped Mario thwart Donkey Kong way back when he still went by Jumpman. Fans of mayhem can crank up the drop rate to ensure non-stop silliness, house rules can be established where certain items are banned and purists can get rid of them entirely, shifting the focus – nay, the genre – from entertaining party game to adept fighter.

SUPER SMASH BROS. ULTIMATE

SWITCH, 2018

■ Once thought to be a deluxe version of the *Wii U* game, Nintendo sent its fanbase into a rabid frenzy of excitement when it revealed that its latest *Smash Bros.* game was brand new and would feature every character that has ever appeared in the game. It once again features eight-player battles, but adds a number of new gameplay modes. Oh, and it even adds new characters, too, and has been delivering a small army of new characters via DLC.

NEWCOMERS (base game)

Inklings [Splatoon]
Princess Daisy [Mario]
Ridley [Metroid]
Dark Samus [Metroid]
Simon Belmont [Castlevania]
Richter Belmonth [Castlevania]
Chrom [Fire Emblem: Awakening]
King K. Rool [DK Country]
Isabelle [Animal Crossing]
Ken Masters [Street Fighter]
Incineroar [Pokémon]
Piranha Plant [Mario]
And more DLC characters!

» While there's not a great deal more to do than simply brawl, additional modes like this help teach you what each character can do.

» In team battles, it's important to look out for your buddy. Wayward items or attacks can hurt them, too!

Combat itself is novel in that the game doesn't feature traditional health bars. Instead, damage accrued by each character is tracked as a percentage at the bottom of the screen, with higher values increasing the effects of additional powerful blows. This feeds directly into the goal of the game, which is to knock opponents off the stage. Any side of the screen will do the trick, with different characters and levels all prioritising different approaches – small stages like Dream Land make blasting rivals off the side the quickest way to go, while characters with strong spiking attacks often do better to stomp their foes off the bottom of the screen. Where possible, that is, as things like the rising acid on the *Metroid* stage deal damage and blasting those who touch it back upwards with considerable force.

The higher your percentage goes, the greater the risk of being sent flying by even the most innocuous of attacks – powerful, well-placed smash attacks can usually finish the deal from around the 50 per cent mark, with 100+ (the maximum is 999, at which point a gentle breeze is enough to finish you off) marking the point at which you need to start being extra careful. Matches are played either for time – where KOs and deaths are tallied up after a fixed period to decide a winner – or for stocks, each fighter having a set number of lives to use before they are eliminated entirely. Coming back into a great fight at 0 per cent after being knocked out is a delight, especially if you'd been panicking about the inevitable KO previously – a chance to be a little more reckless and aggressive with your attacks, and also to exact revenge on whoever it was that didn't think you deserved to be on the screen any more.

For a game with only two attack buttons, there's a surprising degree of depth to *Smash Bros.* and its high-octane combat. The B button is used for special moves, which performs one of three signature attacks when combined with directional inputs – in the N64 original, only up, down and neutral specials exist, but *Melee* added a fourth direction one for left/right inputs. The title ties into the game's novel use of the analogue stick, where gentle movement of the stick and 'smashing' it quickly in the required direction produce different effects. Do this to move and dash, rather than walk; do it with your standard A button attacks and you'll see them upgraded to powerful Smash attacks, generally the best way to introduce opponents to the gaping off-screen abyss. It feels a little strange at first, unresponsive even, almost like you're not in full control. But just like in any other game that makes good use of analogue control, you come to learn your limits and work on your execution, eventually arriving in a place where everything happens exactly as you want it to, barely having to even think about it. That it isn't only played alongside the likes of *Street Fighter* and *Tekken* at tournaments of the highest level, but pulls in comparable figures in terms of entrants and viewers is telling of ▶

SMASH SIBLINGS

Just some of the many pretenders to Nintendo's throne

DREAMMIX TV WORLD FIGHTERS

GC/PS2, 2003

■ Nintendo's success with *Smash* was in bringing together the great brands that already existed under its umbrella. This brawler pinched bits and pieces from all over the place – from Hudson and Konami games to Takara toy lines – and it felt like a bit of a disparate mess for the most part. Still, it let us pit Bomberman against Optimus Prime, so that's something.

JUMP SUPER STARS

DS, 2005

■ Japanese manga magazine *Weekly Shonen Jump* certainly has the brands to go toe-to-toe with Nintendo's big hitters and this is probably the best *Smash* clone we've seen. Pulling in characters and settings from *DragonBall*, *Yu-Gi-Oh!*, *One Piece*, *Bleach*, *Naruto* and *Death Note* (among loads of others), it's a colourful and hyperactive alternative, although it only came out in Japan.

GUILTY GEAR: DUST STRIKERS

DS, 2006

■ While it made respectable use of the stacked dual screens to offer stages with plenty of vertical space, the low resolution did absolutely nothing for *Guilty Gear*'s usually gorgeous art and fights ended up just being ugly and extremely hard to follow. Perhaps the series should stay in its one-on-one comfort zone – PS2 four-way fighter *Isuka* wasn't a whole lot better.

PLAYSTATION ALL-STARS BATTLE ROYALE

PS3/VITA , 2012

■ It's fair to say that the roster of Sony's *Smash* rival didn't quite have the same clout as that of the series that clearly inspired it – the likes of Drake, Kratos, Cole, Sweet Tooth and Dante meant there were a lot of human characters, and not even Sackboy, PaRappa and Toro could redress the balance. It's actually pretty good, just not on the same level as *Smash*.

MEET THE BROS.

An introduction to all 12 of the original characters

JIGGLYPUFF

■ Incredibly hard to use on account of how floaty and weak she is, although skilled players can make great use of her excellent juggle game. Specials are risky and must be used with restraint. Unlocked after beating her at the end of 1P Game.

SPECIAL MOVES

B – Pound
↑ + B – Sing
↓ + B – Rest

PIKACHU

■ Not suited for beginners due to tricky specials and low defense, Pikachu can still be a menace in the hands of an expert. A nimble glass cannon with excellent recovery capabilities.

SPECIAL MOVES

B – Thunder Jolt
↑ + B – Quick Attack
↓ + B – Thunder

FOX

■ What Fox lacks in power, he makes up in movement – he's agile enough to dance around slower opponents and chip away at them, plus his Blaster can be used to do the same from a safe distance.

SPECIAL MOVES

B – Blaster Shot
↑ + B – Fire Fox
↓ + B – Reflector

SAMUS

■ The *Metroid* star is all about controlling the fight from a distance, with amazing mobility options helping her to stay at optimal range while wreaking havoc with projectiles.

SPECIAL MOVES

B – Charge Shot
↑ + B – Screw Attack
↓ + B – Bomb

DONKEY KONG

■ If you want to hit hard and not worry about speed, DK is your guy. He's heavy, making him harder to knock off the stage, but you'll need skill to land his slow attacks on faster fighters.

SPECIAL MOVES

B – Giant Punch
↑ + B – Spinning Kong
↓ + B – Hand Slap

MARIO

■ As you might expect, Nintendo's mascot is a good all-rounder and a solid choice for newcomers and veterans alike, with decent mobility, a good projectile and potential for some nice combos.

SPECIAL MOVES

B – Fireball
↑ + B – Super Jump Punch
↓ + B – Mario Tornado

LUIGI

■ A clone of Mario with a few minor differences, such as a Fireball that travels straight rather than bouncing. Unlocked by clearing Bonus Practice 1 with all eight starting characters.

SPECIAL MOVES

B – Fireball
↑ + B – Super Jump Punch
↓ + B – Luigi Cyclone

YOSHI

■ Poor little Yoshi doesn't have much going for him – his egg projectiles are pretty bad and with no triple jump, getting caught during a flutter jump is usually a death sentence.

SPECIAL MOVES

B – Egg Lay
↑ + B – Egg Throw
↓ + B – Bomb

KIRBY

■ While he may be light, Kirby's best-in-class mobility means that nobody is better at getting back onto the stage after being sent flying. Stone's invincibility and Copy's versatility help make him one of the best.

SPECIAL MOVES

B – Swallow/Copy
↑ + B – Final Cutter
↓ + B – Stone

LINK

■ His regular attacks have such power and range that they're pretty much the best in the game, but that comes at a cost – his specials can be hard to use and his recovery and aerial abilities are both poor.

SPECIAL MOVES

B – Boomerang
↑ + B – Spin Attack
↓ + B – Bomb

CAPTAIN FALCON

■ *F-Zero*'s representative is one of the best all-round characters – even though he lacks a projectile, his power and mobility make up for this once you get a feel for his delayed attacks. Unlock him by clearing 1P Game in under 20 minutes.

SPECIAL MOVES

B – Falcon Punch
↑ + B – Falcon Grab
↓ + B – Falcon Kick

NESS

■ The *Earthbound* hero is all about projectiles. These can leave him vulnerable in more chaotic fights but in a one-on-one situation, he can be extremely hard to approach, as you'll see if you can clear 1P Game on Normal without continuing.

SPECIAL MOVES

B – PK Fire
↑ + B – PK Thunder
↓ + B – PK Shield

HOW TO SMASH

Top tips for any wannabe bros.

EDGE GUARDING

■ If an opponent is trying to make their way back onto the stage after being knocked off, don't just let them back in for free! Toss projectiles and items their way to make it more difficult for them, and if you can, use a downwards spiking attack and/or drop down and grab the ledge yourself before they reach it, safely rolling back up with Z to prevent them getting back on solid ground.

HALF EMPTY

■ Try to get a feel for how many uses each item has. If you're first to use it, you should aim to throw it away with only a charge or two left – the next owner won't know it's about to become useless and you might just buy yourself a little time as they realise.

LEARN TO LOVE Z

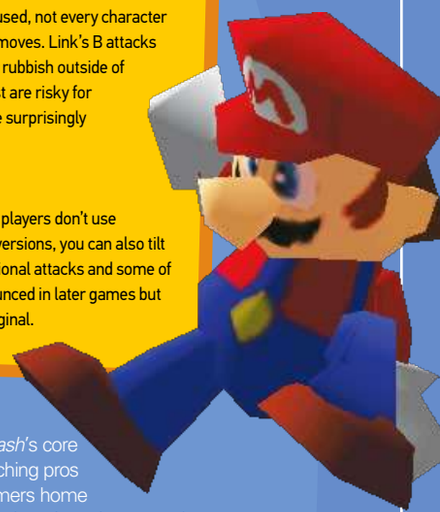
■ Skilled use of the trigger is crucial to good play. While held, you will put up a shield to prevent damage – use this sparingly as it can be depleted quickly. Tap a direction while guarding to roll, which can lead to great openings against slower fighters when timed and spaced well.

NOT THAT SPECIAL

■ Just as Smash attacks shouldn't be abused, not every character should be looking to rely on their special moves. Link's B attacks are all very situational, Yoshi's are largely rubbish outside of the down+B pound and both Sing and Rest are risky for Jigglypuff – look to use throws (which are surprisingly powerful) and regular combos instead.

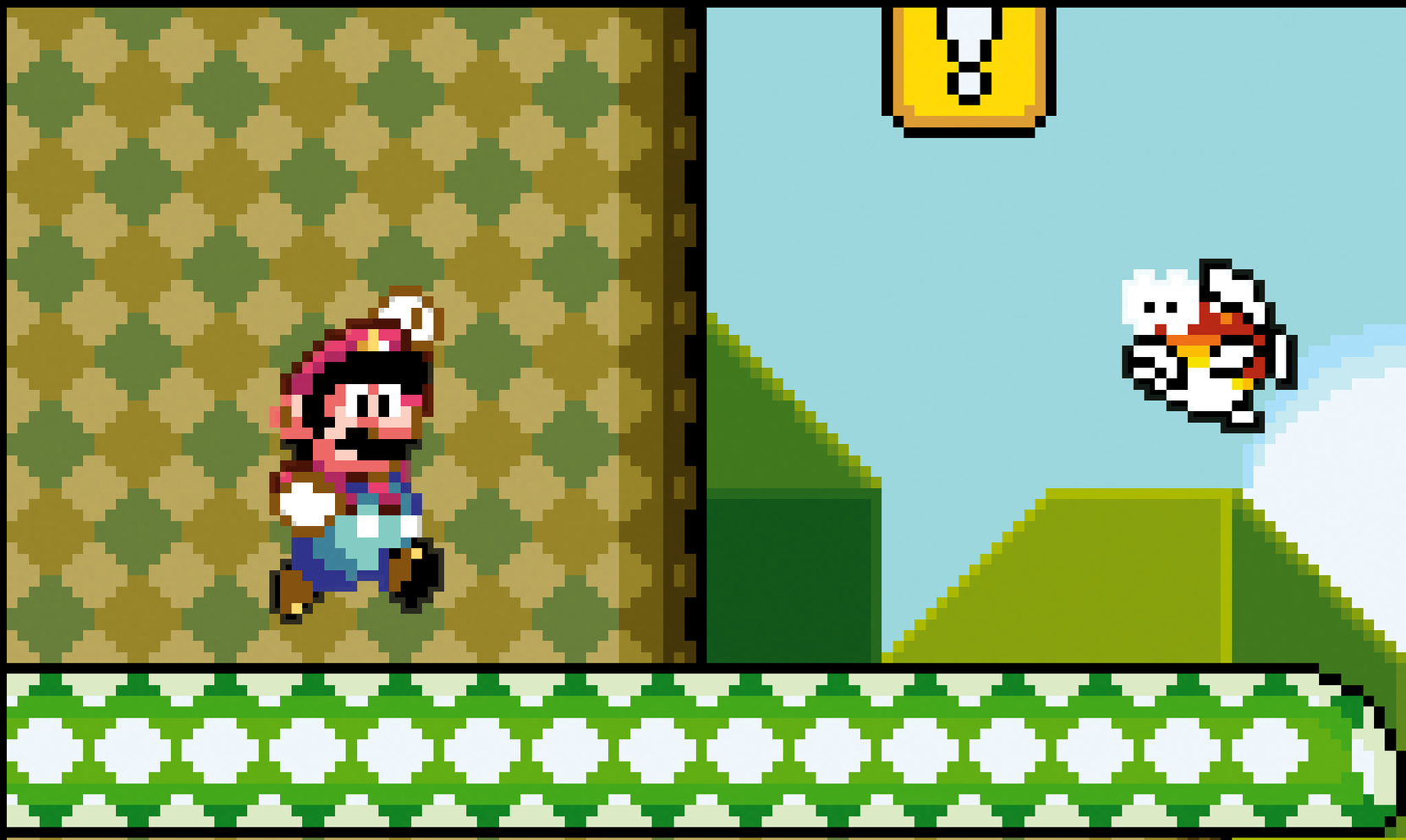
FULL TILT

■ There's a third type of attack that many players don't use properly – as well as neutral and Smash versions, you can also tilt the stick slightly in directions to use additional attacks and some of them are really good. This is more pronounced in later games but you can still perform tilt attacks in the original.



▶ the quality of *Smash*'s core mechanics, and watching pros compete really hammers home just how much more there is to the game than most people who play casually even realise.

While the first game may not have had a great deal going on in terms of modes and options, however, the same criticism cannot be levelled at any of its sequels. Each piled on additional content – loads more playable characters, additional items, cool new modes and in-game trophies and achievements all come together to make every *Smash* game since the first an incredible proposal in terms of value for money. With so much of the game's charm and appeal coming from its expertly-handled fan service, covering more bases just serves to write beautiful new verses in this love letter to all things Nintendo. What was once a fairly basic fighter is now one packed with potential and options; what was one a fairly low-key novelty now one of the most prominent fighting games on the scene. If ever you need reminding what's so good about Nintendo, just go play *Smash* – the ultimate collection of Nintendo's greatest hits and a way more adept fighting game than many give it credit for. ★



Super Mario World

HAIL TO THE PLUMBER

» RETROREVIVAL

» SNES » NINTENDO » 1990

Super Mario World is one of the finest videogames ever created. It's just fact. Characters, structure, level design, humour, the perfect learning curve… all flawless. As anyone who has reached the Holy Grail of 96 exits will tell you, you'd be hard pressed to find a better platform game anywhere, be it from Nintendo's back catalogue or not.

The story is your usual Mario hokum – something to do with missing eggs, a captured Princess and Bowser in a big teacup, but that's not the point. From the absolute get go, Super Mario World is a constant learning experience. Every time you think you've mastered all it has to give, it throws something new at you and opens up countless more play possibilities.

The first of these, and by far the most memorable, is the introduction of a now very famous character into the Mario universe – the loveable green Dinosaur known as Yoshi. As soon as that tongue popped out of his smiley mouth, accompanied by what can only be described as 'the greatest noise of all time', we knew Yoshi was big news. Turns out we were right, he's still going strong today and is now almost as recognisable as the moustachioed one himself.

Along with the little green chap, we were treated to flight via a feather power-up, a natty new spin jump that could destroy blocks beneath you and a host of secrets and extras that kept SNES owners scratching their heads for months. And goombas with parachutes. Never forget them.

My one residing memory of this Miyamoto classic has to be one of the very earliest levels. Set high up in the sky, with shifting and swinging platforms, a constantly scrolling screen and crazy music that sits somewhere between the mushroom kingdom and deliverance. The trick was to hold right on the pad and time your jumps so you could do the whole thing without stopping once. Satisfaction guaranteed. ✱

METROID

SAMUS'

Planet Earth, 1986. Bounty hunter Samus Aran touches down for the first time, bringing with her a tale of adventure on an alien world. Little did she know just how much this debut would go on to impact the three decades of gaming that followed...

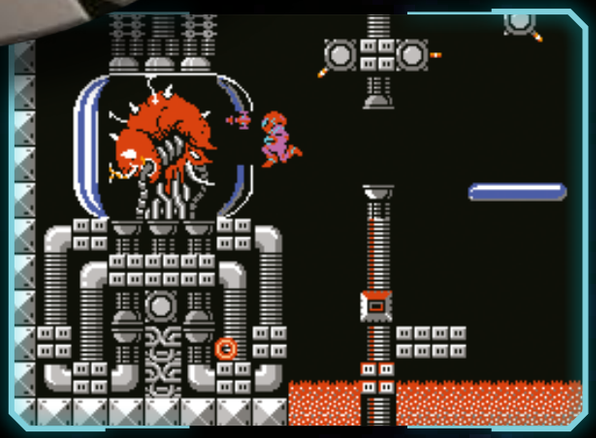
As useful as it may be, there are plenty of reasons not to like the 'Metroidvania' moniker that has been widely adopted to describe games that fuse exploration, platforming and combat. Not only is it a bit of a mouthful, it also feels a little disrespectful to the games that originally laid the groundwork *Metroid* and *Castlevania* would later build on and those excellent examples of the emergent subgenre that have come along since – grating in the same way as hearing someone clueless describe any games console as 'a Nintendo', it's an oversimplification, and a potentially misleading one at that. To offer another example, it's a bit like when all FPS games in the early-to-mid Nineties were called '*Doom* clones' – it's not done out of disrespect, rather convenience and transparency, a term to quickly and easily convey an experience which may otherwise be quite tricky to accurately describe.

» The original *Metroid* is know for being uncompromisingly difficult, with enemies taking a large chunk of Samus' energy upon contact.

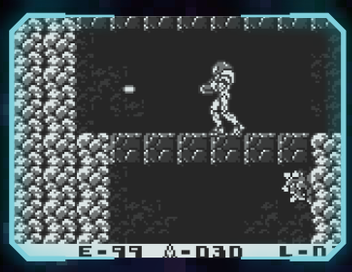
"Being able to communicate what your game is all about with a single word is a huge benefit for your marketing efforts," says Olle Håkansson, creative lead at Image & Form, working on games like *SteamWorld Dig*, which clearly draws a little inspiration from the exploits of one Samus Aran. That said, the team's follow-up game wouldn't find quite so convenient a label. "We're still working on how to sell *SteamWorld Heist* – a great game that defies all attempts at simple explanations," he explains, but what's so hard about explaining a procedural 2D *XCOM*-like game with multiple classes that all fundamentally change how each mission is tackled? Oh. Right. That's more than one word. Divisive as it may be, that label clearly serves a purpose.

In truth, if there absolutely *has* to be a buzzword used to describe similar games, it's probably only fair

ROID LEGACY



» Fighting Mother Brain alone is a defining moment, what comes after however, is more exciting…



» At times the game required some tough pixel-perfect jumping, in order to avoid death by lava or worse. Careful!

» Although Metroids were limited to one area in the original, you had to search far and wide to hunt them down in its sequel.

that *Metroid* be name-checked in it. While there were certainly earlier examples of open-plan game design, it was Samus' debut that finally managed to use it to capture the imagination of a generation. While its NES peers were predominantly jolly, colourful affairs designed to be as accessible as possible, *Metroid* went against the grain to deliver a bleak and lonely experience, one that demanded intricate knowledge of its sometimes obtuse systems and mechanics without ever feeling the need to furnish players with such luxuries as map waypoints or equipment details. Punishing as it may have been, learning the hard way brings with it a degree of job satisfaction that we as players in recent years would somehow grow (or be conditioned) to ignore, hence the popularity boom of the *Souls* games today – while the lack of handholding in FromSoftware's games is certainly welcome amid the sea of 'press X to videogame' titles out there, *Metroid* and games carved in its likeness have been offering that same level of challenge and mystery for three whole decades. It's nothing new... it just *feels* like it is due to how much most modern games want to take your jacket, offer you a glass of warm Cava and lead you safely yet infuriatingly-slowly to the credits. Nothing has changed, and the elements that helped *Metroid* feel so fresh and novel on release – its non-pandering nature and love of dumping players into a hostile and challenging environment – feel every bit as liberating and energising as they did 30 years ago, whatever game they are presented in.

This brings us nicely around to the second half of the du jour portmanteau - '-vania'. Many assume this part of the name to be referring to the way *Symphony Of The Night* turned the classic 16-bit *Castlevania* side-scrollers into something meatier and more involving, but the seeds were planted far earlier. While the arcade action of the original NES release was what most sequels ran with, *Castlevania II: Simon's Quest* ▶

SPEEDRUNS

■ While designed to have players get lost in their weird alien worlds, *Metroid* games are packed with mechanics and designed areas that mean experts can cut completion times by a matter of hours. Using data from howlongtobeat.com and the current records at speedrun.com (where optimised routes and perfect performance are key to smashing records), we aim to show you just how much quicker you could be finishing *Metroid* games.

METROID

NES, 1986

Average Completion Time:
7.5h

Record Completion Time:
11m58s

Average 100% Time:
9h

Record 100% Time:
45m18s

SUPER METROID

SNES, 1994

Average Completion Time:
7.5h

Record Completion Time:
34m'

Average 100% Time:
9h

Record 100% Time:
48m'

* data from speeddemosarchive.com

▶ was a completely different beast – its non-linear structure, RPG influences and open map would all help form the basis of the modern Metroidvania template, even if the translation may not have done it justice and made matters overly cryptic or obtuse. This additional language barrier made this first open *Castlevania* feel a little obnoxious or overly cruel, but *SOTN*'s localisation – cheesy dialogue and all – ironed out the kinks in that original template and delivered a game that can certainly be said to have stolen peoples' souls and made them its slaves. And *Metroid,* too, would evolve through sequels, if perhaps not where you would have maybe expected.

The first *Metroid* I ever played was *Metroid II* on the Game Boy," recalls Devin Monnens, website director of metroid-database.com – the leading fansite for the franchise. "I remember going into the living room while my brother was playing it on the Super Game Boy. The lights were turned down low, and he had on the black background and was exploring the maze beneath Ruins Area 3 with the Varia Suit with the Spazer, neither of which I had collected yet, and those items made Samus look like a badass. So here's this powerful character blasting her way through a foreboding landscape in the dark. There's just something about that atmosphere that really cemented *Metroid* in my psyche, and I became a lifelong fan at that moment." The Game Boy sequel doesn't typically get all that much love, and that's not fair. It gave us the larger, more open maps that later games would go on to be defined by, not to mention defining the design of the Varia Suit as we know and love it today – while colour variants were fine in the NES original, the monochrome visuals of the Game Boy meant that more visible signs were needed when a suit upgrade took place, hence the rounded shoulders of Samus' iconic suit that we all more or less take for granted today.

» The game throws hints at you to point you in the right direction, like this ominous-looking statue.

> "Our first experience with this masterpiece of a game was to defeat the final boss"
>
> Olle Håkansson

Musicians often speak of the 'difficult third album', but *Super Metroid* might just be the best difficult third album ever recorded. Visually, structurally, mechanically... it's not easy to drop the 'P Bomb', but it's effectively perfect – something that can't even be spoiled by the greatest spoiler of all, apparently. "My brother came home one day with a used copy of *Super Metroid.* We had barely heard about the game, and didn't really know what to expect," Olle recalls. "Without knowing it, we continued on the previous owner's save file, starting right at the end of the game. So our first experience with this masterpiece of a game was to defeat the final boss and see the ending credits roll past. Interestingly, this didn't really spoil the game for us. We realised our mistake and started the game from the beginning, knowing about all these cool upgrades and abilities

CHOZO YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

The best games that Metroid and Castlevania spawned

WONDER BOY III: THE DRAGON'S TRAP

MASTER SYSTEM, 1989

■ A example of a traditional side-scroller that upped its game with non-linear design. Here, the various transformations each have their own abilities, meaning exploration is key to getting to those out-of-reach areas. A superb game – and one of the most ambitious of the 8-bit era.

SHADOW COMPLEX

XBOX 360, 2009

■ Despite using the 2.5D visuals, *Shadow Complex* plays around more with 3D space than its side-on peers – enemies in the background can be attacked and return fire, making every encounter exciting. Progress is locked behind ingenious tools, including an awesome gun that fires solidifying foam to create platforms.

BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

MULTI, 2009

■ After years of terrible 3D *Batman* games, Rocksteady came along and created one of the most successful licensed games series. *Asylum*, like *Metroid Prime* before it, presents an awesome 3D playground, with numerous upgrades and tools that open up more and more of the area.

AXIOM VERGE

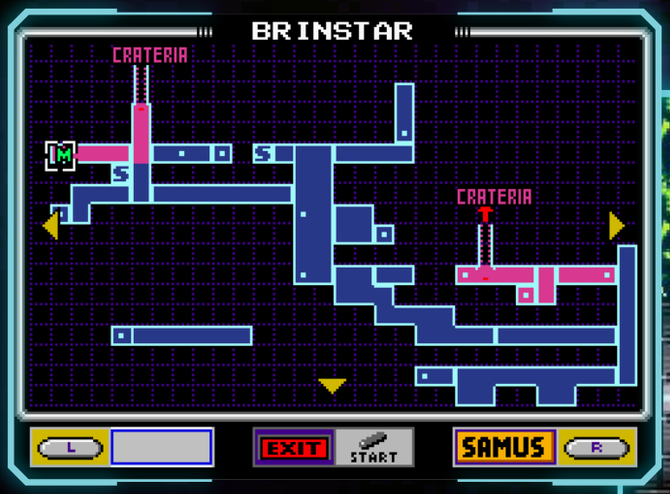
MULTI, 2015

■ Those who like to make sweeping statements might like to call *Axiom Verge* the best *Metroid* game in the last decade, and in honesty we'd struggle to argue with them. Despite being a one-man project, this nails the atmosphere that makes *Metroid* so special and its upgrades are empowering and creative.

ORI AND THE BLIND FOREST

MULTI, 2015

■ In equal parts beautiful, heartbreaking and challenging, *Ori* is among the best examples of modern *Metroid*-inspired design. Controls are tight and while mastering the unique mechanics of moves like Bash isn't easy, the entire adventure is one that you're never likely to forget.



» The Kraid boss fight of *Super Metroid* is a highlight, so much so that it's copied for *Zero Mission*.

we'd eventually get, but we didn't know the whens and hows. I think our false start actually improved the experience for us, giving us a taste of what to expect. While we understood the concept of Shinesparking from observing the ostrich creatures, we never learned how to do wall-jumping back then. My second fondest memory is getting pulled back to the game years later, realising that there's yet another fundamental movement technique that allows for all sorts of sequence breaks and mischief. I've yet to play a game with as much depth as *Super Metroid*."

That 'false start' would go on to be a series staple, an early taste of Samus' full potential right off the bat before it's stripped away and you need to replace each tool in turn to get back to that sensation of true power. It's a stunt *Symphony Of The Night* pulled to an even more extreme degree, in fact – Death, none too pleased with Alucard's intentions of doing in the Lord Of Darkness, strips him of the overpowered weapons and armour he starts the game in and kicks off a gradual gear grind akin to a more traditional RPG. On top of this, relics layer on new mechanics and tools gradually, but it's the slow burn of unlocking these extra abilities that really gives you a chance to master them. Unlock them for real and reach the end and you'll become unstoppable, which is when you think back to those early stages and realise just how little use you actually made of your character's full potential and yet *still* felt awesome.

Devin accurately points out that this gradual accrual of power to facilitate further exploration is far from unique in the wider spectrum of gaming. "With a Metroidvania, the mechanics of 'find this item, and now you can access this new area' are essentially the same as *Zelda*, except it's side-scrolling: gravity and jumping are central to the gameplay, but absent from *Zelda*," he reasons. "*Metroid* focuses primarily on movement through vertical space – gravity and jumping. This ▶

METROID II: RETURN OF SAMUS

GAME BOY, 1991

Average Completion Time:
4h

Record Completion Time:
57m42s

Average 100% Time:
5.5h

Record 100% Time:
59m

MAKING A METROIDVANIA

DrinkBox Studios' David Rusak talks about how the genre lives on

What are your earliest or fondest memories of the *Metroid* series?
For me personally, *Super Metroid* is the biggest touchstone of the series from my childhood. The cinematic presentation of this game was just incredibly impressive for its time – and it starts off with such a bang. The opening section on the attacked ship and the final Mother Brain fight both stick out as vivid memories. Even today, the atmosphere, music and staging of this game make it so much easier to take seriously right off the bat than almost anything from the era.

What do you think was the franchise's most important contribution to gaming?
The game format is the obvious thing to pick here. Seeding the gaming universe with such a wicked female hero so is also definitely notable. I'm sure the series has contributed more innovations that I'm not even aware of.

There are clearly some big fans of *Metroid* over at DrinkBox Studios – what's your take on the more recent 3D *Metroid* games?
To me the *Metroid Prime* games are a shining example of the classic Nintendo trend of publishing ridiculously novel sequels to already-awesome franchises. The *Prime* games have really different gameplay strengths and weaknesses from the 2D games, but they preserve and maybe even improve on that core feeling of super-engrossing, solitary exploration. Fumbling with recreating that feeling, and with the narrative in general, was exactly where *Other M* really lost me personally – despite doing some interesting and novel gameplay stuff with characteristic Team Ninja slickness. In general, though, seeing Samus' character switch from an inscrutable, hulking suit of space armour to sexy high-heeled space-lycra in more and more media kinda bums me out.

***Metroid*'s influence is evident in *Guacamelee!*, but do you think it permeates your other projects as well?**
Our new game, *Severed*, definitely takes game structure cues from the 'Metroidvania' format as well, with inaccessible areas that you later realise you can come back to. And we have a silent protagonist determinedly finding her way through a spooky, alien environment, with explicit storytelling by and large trying to stay out of your way – I think there are a lot of atmosphere notes that *Severed* has in common with the *Metroid* series.

Are there any aspects of or areas in *Guacamelee* (besides the Choozo statues) that pay direct homage to *Metroid*?
There are also a few statues in the Forest del Chivo that look suspiciously like the titular alien itself... Honestly, we already felt like we were really pushing our luck with the Choozos!

Why do you think Metroidvanias are so popular among modern indie developers?
On the superficial level, it's definitely been, and maybe continues to be, a key word that readily gets people's interest. But I think there's good reason for that. As a player, I find a lot of explicit game narratives I encounter forgettable, and also find myself more or less forgetting the many beautifully-crafted game worlds that I'm often dragged through to let those narratives unfold. A format of game that instead invites/forces you to familiarise yourself with its places, to get lost, probe around for secrets, and revisit with new abilities, lets you get really involved with its world in a totally different way from those on-railsiest of game plots. Designing for this kind of freedom has plenty of its own challenges, and it's all for naught if you don't make it fun to spend all that time there – but I think there's still heaps of new things to be tried in this space, and I can't wait to play them!

SUIT UP

Samus' ever-improving loadout and how it assists in scaling new heights

BEAM

■ Samus' arm cannon is a versatile tool, with numerous upgrades made available over the course of her many missions. The basic form is the Power Beam, capable of firing energy blasts rapidly and the most basic upgrade to this is the Charge Beam, allowing her to store up power before unleashing one big powerful blast. Other recurring upgrades include the Plasma Beam – which fires potent beams that penetrate enemies, except in *Prime* where it's a short-range heat-based beam – the enemy-freezing Ice Beam and the Wave Beam, which can pass through certain walls.

SUIT

■ While she usually starts in a basic Power Suit, Samus tends to get several crucial upgrades over the course of each mission. The most common of these is the Varia Suit, offering increased resistance to damage and extreme temperatures. Other suit upgrades tend to vary from game to game – the Gravity Suit is perhaps the most common behind the Varia, with the Fusion Suit coming to the fore in the first GBA game and several Phazon-based ones appearing in the *Prime* trilogy. There's also the Zero Suit, the basic jumpsuit worn beneath the various armoured suits.

MISSILE LAUNCHER

■ We said that Samus' arm cannon was a versatile piece of kit, and we weren't kidding – it also doubles as a rocket launcher, vital for dealing with armoured enemies or door locks. Missile ammo is finite and must be topped up with ammo drops from enemies or charging stations, while Missile Expansions are typically the most common form of collectible. This launcher, like the Power Beam, is upgradeable as well, with more powerful Super Missiles available in pretty much all of the games and a few less common upgrades, such as Seeker Missiles.

MORPH BALL

■ This ability usually appears early in a *Metroid* adventure, since it's essential for exploration in lieu of the ability to crouch or crawl. While it looks like it must be uncomfortable and disorienting, being able to roll up into a ball and enter gaps is crucial to success. With the right upgrades, Samus can also deploy ordnance in the form of Morph Ball Bombs and Power Bombs, useful for dealing with small threats without morphing back to normal, powering up certain sockets and even granting additional mobility – with correct time and placement, standard Morph Ball Bombs can be used to propel Samus skywards, sometimes leading to shortcuts and sequence breaks that only skilled players will be able to reach.

OTHER

■ Not all of Samus' upgrades can be categorised easily, but that doesn't make them any less useful. Health Tanks are up there with Missile Expansions as the most common collectibles. Then there's the Speed Booster, which lets Samus turn into a speeding juggernaut after running in a fixed direction for a few seconds. This in turn allows the Shinespark to be performed, a directional leap that retains the momentum of the dash. Finally, each *Metroid* game tends to have a few of its own unique upgrades too, whether it's the additional Visors found in the *Prime* games or the melee-focused moves and abilities found in *Other M*.

BOOTS

■ Given the series' emphasis on vertical exploration, it's hardly surprising that Samus gets various enhancements that improve her jumping ability, as well as the ability to kick off of walls. Like all of her other power-ups, these come in multiple flavours – the High Jump Boots grant greater height for her basic leap, while the Space Jump Boots enable that perennial videogame favourite, the physics-mocking double jump. This can be upgraded again to further spit in the face of science with the Screw Attack, with which Samus can use to stay airborne for extended periods with multiple jumps, all the while immune to most damage and ripping through any enemies that stand in her way.

» [GBA] Fighting a boss usually meant that a new upgrade to your arsenal was just around the corner.

» [GBA] Upon defeating a boss monster in *Fusion*, you had to then fight the X Parasite hiding within.

> "You cannot have a Metroidvania without that vertical movement"
>
> Devin Monnens

▶ is coupled with spatial navigational skills – being able to find your way around the map. I don't think you can have a Metroidvania without that vertical movement. Combat, if present, can be ranged or close quarters, but typically involves manoeuvring vertically around the enemy (as opposed to say *Mega Man* or *Contra*, which are largely horizontal)." Compare the maps from, for argument's sake, *A Link To The Past* and *Super Metroid* and you'll see similarly large 2D play spaces with all the expected barriers where new skills or items are needed to progress, but this just highlight a crucial difference – as Devin says, gravity is a key factor in *Metroid* or any similar game. The top-down view of those classic *Zelda* games means that Link can effectively fly around the screen, while a side-on perspective gives an additional layer to deal with on a gameplay level, often involving feats of skill and timing that you seldom see in other examples of gated game design.

It's for this reason that the first full-3D *Metroid* game, *Prime*, was initially met with an air of caution.

» *Zero Mission* was effectively a full remake of the original game, detailing Samus' first adventure in greater detail.

Adding *another* layer of complexity could have easily made matters overly confusing and lost a lot of what made the series great, with the fact that Nintendo had previously gone a whole generation without a new *Metroid* game seemingly cementing the notion that the model wasn't viable in 3D. Indeed, series cocreator Yoshio Sakamoto has since come out and confirmed that the team struggled with the transition to 3D. "I felt that I shouldn't be the one making the game," he explained in an interview with *games™* several years ago. "When I held the N64 controller in my hands, I just couldn't imagine how it could be used to move Samus around. So for me, it was just too early to personally make a 3D *Metroid* at that time." He went on to reveal that Nintendo even approached an external developer (who, sadly, he would not name specifically) to tackle a 3D *Metroid* for the N64, but they too declined due to a lack of confidence in being able to create something that would compare favourably to *Super Metroid*.

While the identity of that mystery studio will likely be a secret that only those involved are ever privy to, the power of hindsight gives us reasonable grounds on which to speculate. We'd suggest that it could have been Iguana Entertainment, early front-runners in 3D gaming on the N64 with *Turok*, a series which, alongside Rare's work, would define the FPS experience for that console generation – a perfect fit for a 3D *Metroid* at the time, surely? The plot thickens, too. Iguana founder Jeff Spangenberg would go on to form Retro Studios with the help of Nintendo and some former Iguana colleagues, with the new studio originally having four early GameCube games in development before resources were shifted towards retooling one, which went by the rudimentary working title of ▶

METROID FUSION

GBA, 2002

Average Completion Time: 5h

Record Completion Time: 45m

Average 100% Time: 7.5h

Record 100% Time: 1h4m

METROID PRIME

GAMECUBE, 2002

Average Completion Time: 13h

Record Completion Time: 53m

Average 100% Time: 19h

Record 100% Time: 1h13m

SEQUENCE BREAKS

Because doing things in correct order is for chumps

METROID PRIME

DOUBLING DOWN ON MOBILITY

■ Samus' first 3D outing is initially stingy when it comes to movement upgrades, although that can be addressed seconds after touching down on Tallon IV. By using a trick that involves performing what is known as a 'dash jump' from the top of Samus' ship while locked onto an object, it's possible to reach the nearby ledge to grab the Space Jump Boots early and start double-jumping way sooner than you'd otherwise be able to. This, in turn, allows early access to a Missile Expansion before you even get the launcher.

DARK SOULS

BLIGHTTOWN BACK DOOR

■ Ask anyone and they'll tell you that Blighttown is not only the worst area in the original *Dark Souls* but one of the most frustrating locations in gaming history. It's dark, horribly designed and plagued with enemies that can poison you, so skipping it is always going to be preferable. There are a number of ways to do this – taking the Master Key as your 'gift' when creating a character is the easiest one, allowing several areas and bosses to be avoided entirely to enter Blighttown's easier route via the Valley Of The Drakes.

CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

CHEATING DEATH

■ While there are loads of glitches and tricks that can be used to explore the castle more freely than the developers expected, this is perhaps the most novel. Remember how Death shows up near the start and steals your powerful gear? Yeah, you can skip that and keep your equipment – taking a hit that deals damage greater than half max HP will send Alucard flying at extreme speed until he hits a wall, which can be exploited on the Wargs in the hallway to soar past the room where Death's little visit would usually take place without letting him rob you.

SUPER MARIO WORLD

STAR ROAD SHORTCUT

■ While not a Metroidvania game, the classic platformer still has elements that are intended to be used on later return visits to early levels. With good execution, it's possible to exit Donut Plains 1 via the secret exit, which would usually only be accessible after clearing the Green Switch Palace – using the Cape, it's possible to reach the hidden area near the end of the level to reach Donut Secret 1, which in turn leads to Donut Secret House and then Star Road. Doing this, you can skip the majority of the game.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME

A LINK TO WHEREVER

■ Considering its status as one of the all-time greats, *Ocarina Of Time* is surprisingly broken. Countless glitches and tricks have been discovered over the years that let you do everything from taking Young Link into late dungeons to inventory manipulation that lets you do silly things like playing bombs as if they were Link's ocarina. Using any combination of these tricks, it's possible to skip large sections of the game or tackle dungeons in pretty much any order you like, making this title a hotly-contested challenge for speedrunners.

» [GBA] In *Zero Mission*, if you fully charge your beam and perform a somersault, you can damage your enemies similarly to your Screw Attack.

▶ *Action Adventure*, to be a new *Metroid* game, *Metroid Prime*, while cancelling the other three titles. Could it be that the ex-Iguana guys finally cracked the code several years down the line? It would certainly explain the working title – nothing screams 'we want this game to belong to a particular franchise but it can't currently for legal reasons' quite like not bothering to come up with a moniker that is more than just the name of the game's genre. Food for thought, certainly, especially since we'll likely never know for sure.

What we *do* know for sure, however, is that Retro absolutely smashed it with *Prime*. Minor sacrifices were made in terms of verticality but everything else – from tone, to sense of isolation, to wonder of exploration – was spot-on. Seeing this alien world through Samus' visor for the first time was incredible and with the camera pulling back to a third-person angle during Morph Ball transformations, it even managed to retain a lot of the classic game design while transitioning into 3D space. "I think they did a really good job, perhaps even better than the 2D efforts," says Thomas Happ, creator of *Axiom Verge*, widely celebrated as the best new *Metroid* game in years even though it isn't even part of the series. "The only thing I might ask further would be to find a solution to the 'glowing objects are the only important ones' problem with the visor. The environments are so amazingly well-crafted that it's kind of a shame when you start scanning and realise most of it is just empty collision geometry with no function. This doesn't seem to be an issue in 2D but seems necessary in 3D." A valid point, for sure, but Devin is once again on hand to drop truth bombs.

» Like *Mario 64, Metroid Prime* transitioned the series into the third dimension effortlessly..

"3D changes how players navigate space," he explains. "As a designer, you have to consider what the player is able to see from any given vantage point, and you also have to figure out how they will navigate platforms. With *Metroid Prime*, the game is also in first-person, so the player sees through the eyes of Samus. This not only affects the game's combat (dashing and circling an enemy versus jumping around it to shoot from different angles) but also immerses the player inside the suit. You don't get a sense of how visually cool Samus is while walking around and it's harder to get a wider range of combat in first-person, but you can get a better sense of how the world looks." It's a trade-off, then – one that sacrifices the visual design of the now-iconic heroine in order to deliver a better sense of place and that reworks combat to work on a horizontal 2D plane rather than a vertical one for the most part.

So strong was Retro's take, we went from having a generation with no *Metroid* games straight into one with three – *Prime* became a trilogy before Nintendo looked to shake things up on Wii by having *Ninja Gaiden* developer Team Ninja deliver its interpretation. While combat was superb (par for the course for the well-versed team) and exploration still felt good with a third-person 3D viewpoint, *Other M* was let down by its portrayal of Samus. Having always been a strong female lead, here she came across weak and reliant on others – a shortcoming that perhaps should have been expected from the *Dead Or Alive* team, to whom 'fleshing out' a character clearly has a very different meaning to that of the rest of the industry. Nevertheless, *Prime*'s influence lives on and often in the most unexpected places. Rocksteady's superb *Batman* games use much the same system of gated progression, for instance, *Arkham Asylum* particularly due to its confined play space and setting. A fourth *Prime* game has now been confirmed by Nintendo, but little else is currently known about it.

» Certain areas of *Metroid: Other M* required you to switch between first and third-person perspectives to locate useful items and fight enemies.

> "The new Tomb Raider games are Metroidvanias, as was Arkham Asylum"
> Thomas Happ

But while *Prime*'s influence can be *traced*, the 2D *Metroid* template can't be avoided today. It's a staple of many an indie title, from *Ori And The Blind Forest* to *Shadow Complex*, and with good reason. "I think it's a good game design," says Thomas. "Remember when every open world game was compared to *GTA*? But it's just a good way to design a lot of different games. Same thing for Metroidvanias. The new *Tomb Raider* games are Metroidvanias, as was *Arkham Asylum*, just you don't hear them described like that because they're not 2D side-scrollers." Olle agrees. "It's a great recipe that gives a lot of good gameplay for relatively small amounts of work," he tells us. "I'm not saying that building Metroidvanias is simple, but a good foundation gives you a leverage effect from how much work you have to put in versus the amount of fun you get out of it."

However you feel about the transition of the *Metroid* or *Castlevania* series into 3D, the truth is that triple-A 3D titles from those franchises do nothing to devalue the games that helped coin the Metroidvania moniker, nor do they take anything away from the smaller modern games that wear it proudly. "I can't imagine wanting to make the same game over and over again, just with new artwork," closes Thomas. "But the basic design – encountering obstacles that you can overcome by exploring to find new abilities – is just a good one. I don't think it'll ever go out of style." ✱

METROID: ZERO MISSION

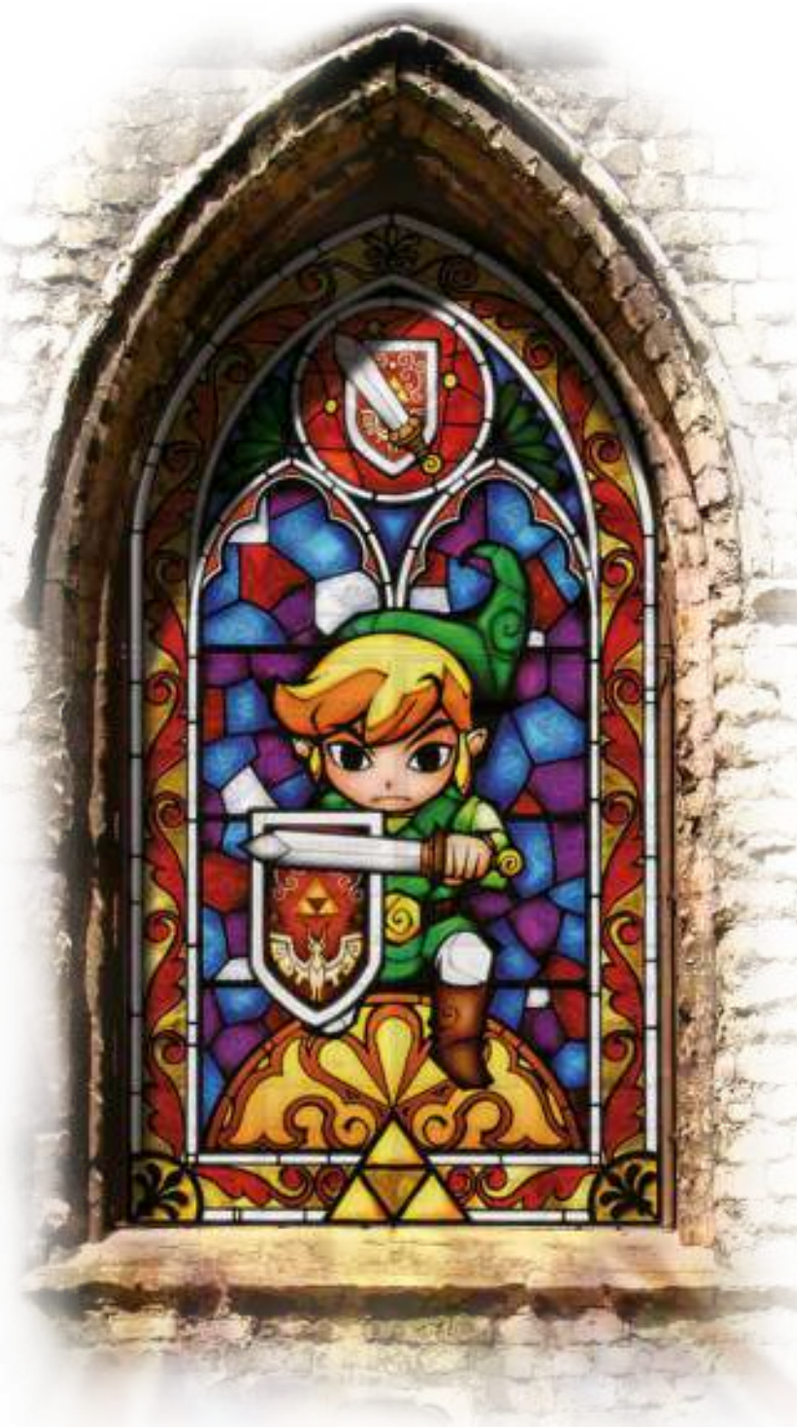
GBA, 2004

Average Completion Time:
4h

Record Completion Time:
26m19s

Average 100% Time:
6h

Record 100% Time:
50m15s



THE HISTORY OF ZELDA

DONKEY KONG MAY WELL HAVE BEEN NINTENDO'S MOST IMPORTANT CREATION BUT THERE'S ANOTHER THAT WAS THE REAL DRIVING FORCE BEHIND THE COMPANY'S SUCCESS; A GAME THAT THE BIG APE HELPED TO STUMP UP THE CASH FOR. JOIN STUART HUNT AND NICK THORPE AS THEY CELEBRATE ONE OF GAMING'S GREATEST FRANCHISES

Since his videogame debut in 1985 (save for the Virtual Boy), Link has always worked his little elfin boots off to ignite interest into every single piece of Nintendo hardware to ever find a release… and even some of the weird and wonderful contraptions that never left his native Japan. Even through that dark GameCube period, where seemingly infallible Nintendo IPs were somehow failing to capture that Nintendo magic, there was one licence that has always looked after its Nintendo Seal of Quality. It's apt then that *Zelda* would become the final resting place for the GameCube, and the first licence that Nintendo would turn to as a 'proper' launch title for its much-hyped Switch.

Before Hyrule, videogames were usually single-screen worlds filled with bleeping and chirping sprites, where progression and skill was distinguished by stamping three letters into a list. And before *The Legend Of Zelda*, game narratives were generally spared a measly paragraph on an arcade cab or a few dubiously spelt words on a menu screen, and rules and stories would generally play out via easily digestible visuals and an ounce of common sense – escape the ghosts, shoot the crab-looking invader, avoid those asteroids.

Off the back of the unprecedented arcade success of *Donkey Kong*, Nintendo would be able to finance three pivotal projects that would transform it from a Hanafuda card manufacturer dabbling in the world of electronic entertainment, to a leading player in that very market almost overnight: the Famicom, *Super Mario Bros* and *The Legend Of Zelda*.

Zelda's development would begin at around the same time as *Super Mario Bros*, with Shigeru Miyamoto splitting his time between his divided development team and overseeing both projects. His early intention for *The Legend Of Zelda* was to create a sprawling 'virtual garden'; a videogame set inside a lush world that would grow and unfurl. The thinking, at that time, was that *Super Mario Bros* was going to offer an immediately accessible and technically unique gaming experience, and *The Legend Of Zelda* would offer gamers the freedom to essentially shape their own adventure.

Despite this peculiar juxtaposition of projects inside the camp, *Mario* and *Zelda* would both decide to outmode the element of high-score chasing and instead replace it with the notion of completion – ending the gaming experience and unlocking a reward screen for your troubles. It was a belief that wouldn't hold up inside the money-feeding world of arcade gaming, but one that Miyamoto believed was perfectly viable in the home.

Miyamoto grew up in the small town of Sonebe, in Kyoto, Japan – a picturesque upbringing that would offer the perfect place for his fertile mind to wander. He was a keen artist with an affinity for music, architecture and design; passions that would ultimately lead him onto an academic road in industrial design and as a staff artist for Nintendo. But it was his early fascination for exploration that he would ultimately try to impart to the player through *Zelda*.

His inspiration behind the dungeons – now a staple of the *Zelda* series – came

» *Zelda II* is generally regarded as one of the weakest games in the series.

» *The Legend of Zelda* satisfied Miyamoto's love of exploring. It remains a superb NES game.

A Link To The Palm

WE TAKE A QUICK LOOK AT SOME OF LINK'S BEST PORTABLE ADVENTURES

The Legend Of Zelda: Link's Awakening

Released: 1993
System: Game Boy

The first, and what many fans consider the best, portable *Zelda* game. *Link's Awakening* was a dazzling GB follow-up to *A Link To The Past* that would mark the first time that the series would ever play an away game and Zelda and the Triforce would get left on the sub's bench. It's also the first *Zelda* game not to be directed by Shigsy – possibly why it has a lot of *Mario* imagery in it. Link is marooned on the strange island of Koholint, where he learns of the mysterious Wind Fish; a giant guppy that lives inside an egg sitting aloft a volcano. Legend has it that when the fish is awoken he will be mighty peeved and the island will disappear, so Link and an owl set off to find an orchestra of instruments and aim to wake up the slumbering Fish to put the myth to the test.

The Legend Of Zelda: Link's Awakening DX

Released: 1998
System: Game Boy Color

Adding its name to the Game Boy Color's Deluxe series, *Link's Awakening DX* would be a coloured-in, spruced-up port of the Game Boy original. As well as improving the visuals (which looked pretty fantastic to begin with) Nintendo would also add a few new additions to the game, most notably a new 'Color Dungeon', which made use of colour-based puzzles, and a camera shop and photo album function that made use of the Game Boy Printer.

The Legend Of Zelda: Oracle Of Seasons/Oracle of Ages

Released: 2001
System: Game Boy Color/Game Boy Advance

Released consecutively, *Oracle Of Ages* and *Oracle Of Seasons* would be the first handheld *Zelda* games not to be developed by Nintendo. Instead, the Capcom/Sega-funded studio Flagship, founded by Capcom stalwart Yoshiki Okamoto, would take hold of the reigns. The *Oracle* series would initially start out as a planned Triforce trilogy; three games that could be played in any order and allow your actions in one game to have an influence on the others. Because of the complexity in achieving this, the idea was later scrapped and the trilogy became a duo. But through use of a password system the influencing elements would remain.

The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past & Four Swords

Released: 2003
System: Game Boy Advance

Marking the start of a series crossover between the GBA and the GameCube, Flagship Studios was at it again with this sublime double-pack that housed a brilliant redux of the SNES classic and a four-player multiplayer add-on in *Four Swords* (the first time the series would introduce multiplayer elements). *Four Swords* allowed two to four players to link up their GBAs, take control of a different coloured Link (red, blue, purple and green) and work together to crack its clever colour-themed puzzles. Adopting *The Wind Waker*'s chipper look, the game would also introduce a new villain in Vaati, who would become an iniquitous mainstay in the *Four Swords* series.

The Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap

Released: 2004
System: Game Boy Advance

Just to make things confusing for everyone, *The Minish Cap* marks the final game in Flagship's *Four Swords* trilogy, but is actually said to be the prequel to the first game (*Link's Awakening: Four Swords*) in the series. In terms of narrative – sages being mysteriously transformed into talking caps, Link shrinking in size and then bafflingly transforming into a large sphere – it is all a little bit strange, but it all makes for another quality *Zelda* caper. Graphically, with a closer camera, picking up the brilliant hues and attention to detail packed into the game, *The Minish Cap* is probably the best-looking *Zelda* handheld game to find a release before *Phantom Hourglass*.

The Legend Of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass

Released: 2007
System: DS

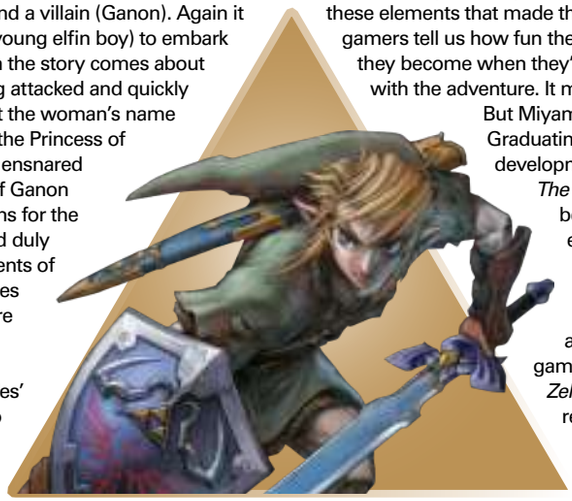
Making inspired use of the Nintendo DS's touch-screen capabilities, *The Legend Of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass* shows us how great a *Zelda* game can be when Nintendo builds it specifically around its hardware (which has us eagerly anticipating whatever it has up its sleeves for the series on the Wii). A direct sequel to *Wind Waker*, seafaring elements would again play a strong role, with the stylus being used to plot your journey and jot down notes and reminders on the game map. Couple this with a brilliant story, lush visuals and quirky puzzles and *Phantom Hourglass* maintains *Zelda*'s impeccable handheld lineage.

» *Four Swords Adventures* on the GameCube allowed four friends to link up their GBAs and tier off to do their own thing.

» *Four Swords Adventures* introduced a unique strategy element to the combat of *Zelda*. While teamwork was essential, it soon went to pot once everyone started fighting over rupees.

from the many hours he would spend playing around the rooms of his home as a boy, and the crystal lakes and bountiful greenery of Hyrule from his recollections of exploring the vast fields nearby. Miyamoto's decision to use the name Zelda was inspired by the wife of the American author F Scott Fitzgerald. Famously dubbed "the first American flapper" (the term for a ladette in the Forties), it was her wilful nature that Miyamoto would find so endearing, and persuade him to select her as the muse for the titular princess.

As with *Donkey Kong* and *Super Mario Bros*, Miyamoto would polarise *Zelda*'s story around three central characters: a hero (Link), a damsel (Princess Zelda) and a villain (Ganon). Again it would look to an unusual hero (a young elfin boy) to embark on the quest. Link's involvement in the story comes about after he spots an old woman being attacked and quickly jumps to her aid. He discovers that the woman's name is Impa and that she is a porter to the Princess of Hyrule. He then hears news of the ensnared princess at the nefarious trotters of Ganon and learns of Ganon's evil intentions for the Triforce and the land of Hyrule, and duly agrees to seek out the eight segments of the Triforce of Wisdom and ventures to the top of Death Mountain where Ganon awaits.



In the first game, the Triforce is described as 'three magical triangles' capable of granting great power to their bearer. But its mythology and origins would continue to evolve throughout the series. Essentially, the Triforce is the catalyst, the object of desire that brings and binds the story and characters together. Inside Hyrule there exists three parts to the Triforce: the Triforce of Power that Ganon acquires during his siege on Hyrule castle, the Triforce of Wisdom, which is the part Link is seeking inside the dungeons beneath Hyrule, and the Triforce of Courage, which would first make an appearance in *The Adventure Of Link*.

The Legend Of Zelda was first released in 1986 on the Famicom Disc System, a secondary disk drive that made use of rewritable disks, which never found a release outside of Japan. In the West the game came pressed on majestic gold cartridges that incorporated an internal battery facility to save game data, and it would become the first game cartridge to do this.

Miyamoto's notion to have the game feel completely bilinear was very apparent. Dropped into a huge overhead world, paved with little direction, it would be left to the player to decipher *Zelda*'s modus through consideration and natural exploration alone; a mantra that actually caused a bout of anxiety in the prolific game designer when the game was eventually released.

"I remember that we were very nervous because *The Legend Of Zelda* was our first game that forced players to think about what they should do next," Miyamoto told Superplay magazine. "We were afraid gamers would become bored and stressed by the new concept. Luckily, they reacted the total opposite. It was these elements that made the game so popular and today gamers tell us how fun the *Zelda* riddles are, and how happy they become when they've solved a task and proceeded with the adventure. It makes me a happy producer!"

But Miyamoto needn't have worried. Graduating with honours alongside its developmental classmate *Super Mario Bros*, *The Legend Of Zelda* would go on to be hugely successful for Nintendo, eventually grossing sales of 6 million copies.

As with *Donkey Kong*, Nintendo was quick to churn out a sequel while the popularity of the game was still piquant. And a year later *Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link* was released. Although Miyamoto would oversee the game's development, its creation would fall to a new development team, one who would switch the action from overhead to a side-on perspective and bathe it in subtle *Mario*-esque platform undertones – a change that proved to be unpopular with fans of the original. Its structure would remain generally similar to the first though. It is another 'find several somethings' (nine crystals) to open 'something' (the Great Palace) that holds 'something with wish-granting properties' (the Triforce of Courage) – and this is a structure that has been mirrored for almost every game in the series.

The Adventure Of Link would also introduce a few staples of the RPG genre that would never really take off in the series. Link, for instance, could earn experience points to beef up his attacks, raise his stamina and also obtain magic points to cast spells. However, the game would also introduce village sections, where

The Missing Links

We take a look at some of the Zelda titles that slipped through the release net…

The Legend Of Zelda 64
Nintendo 64DD
Originally said to be a launch title for the 64DD, *The Legend Of Zelda 64* was rumoured to have been a weird coaxial of *Ocarina Of Time* and *Majora's Mask*. Long delays and a lack of confidence in the hardware would force Nintendo to cram the game on to a large N64 cart and release it as *Ocarina Of Time* instead.

Zelda: Gaiden
Nintendo 64DD
Rumoured to be a very early sequel to *Ocarina Of Time* that would make full use of the 64DD's advanced memory system, this 64DD *Zelda* project was again switched to standard N64 carts and would be released as *Majora's Mask*.

Ura Zelda
Nintendo 64DD
Picking up where *Ocarina* left off, this add-on pack originally intended for the 64DD was to chronicle Link's mission to find the Triforce. It would later find a release in the form of the *Master Quest* bonus disc and was released with *The Wind Waker*.

The Legend Of Zelda
Game Boy Color
Said to be developed by Capcom's studio Flagship, it's believed that inside the vaults of Nintendo headquarters lives an extremely sought-after GBC port of the original NES game. If this rumour holds water then it's probably the most valuable videogame in existence.

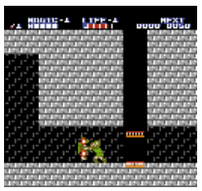
The Mystical Seed series aka Triforce Trilogy
Game Boy Colour
The two games from the *Oracle* series would originally be intended to be a series of three games called the *Mystical Seed* series. They were to be named after the three seeds of Power, Courage and Wisdom. One game was eventually dropped and Flagship would release them as two games.

Zelda III
NES
Apparently, before releasing *A Link To The Past* on the Super Nintendo it's believed that Nintendo was actually working on another *Zelda* game for the NES that was said to marry elements of the first two games. It's believed that its bones were later used to create *Link's Awakening*.

The many legends of Zelda

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA (1986)
The evil pig-faced Ganon has invaded Hyrule Kingdom and kidnapped Princess Zelda. During the siege he steals the Triforce of Power. But it transpires that a cunning Zelda somehow managed to shatter the Triforce of Wisdom and scatter its parts around the dungeons of Hyrule. When Link gets wind of this he vows to collect up the pieces, glue them back together and go and save the princess.

ZELDA II: THE ADVENTURE OF LINK (1987)
Lending quite a bit from *Sleeping Beauty*, Link is trying to wake Princess Zelda from a potent sleeping spell cast on her by a powerful sorcerer. The evil mage is holed up inside the ruins of the Great Palace and has locked the door using magic. It's up to Link to seek out the scattered shards of the Magic Crystal in Hyrule, break the seal, fight a doppelgänger and then restore peace to Hyrule Kingdom.



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST (1991)
Thanks to an evil sorcerer named Agahnim, Ganon has returned from the darkness again – and this time he has a pitchfork with him! Agahnim has also dethroned the king of Hyrule, kidnapped his daughter Zelda and opened up a portal to the Golden Land that has allowed a whole bunch of evil to flood in and wreak havoc in the once peaceful land of Hyrule.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME (1998)
Ganon's back once again in *Ocarina Of Time*, and this time he's up to his old megalomaniac tricks, so Link's on a mission to banish him to the Dark World forever (well, at least until the next *Zelda* release, that is). To do this Link requires the power of the Seven Sages, and to find them he must travel back in time making changes in one time that will have a knock-on affect on the next.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: MAJORA'S MASK (2000)
Link is cast into an alternative world known as Termina (a slightly more chic version of Hyrule). But when he arrives he soon discovers that the world, in three days time, will be levelled to dust by its moon. With just 72 hours on the clock, Link must work fast to locate Majora's Mask and save the world and its people from an imminent moon-crushing.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER (2002)
In *The Wind Waker* Link is on a mission to rescue his sister, who has been abducted and locked up somewhere by a giant bird. Surrounded by miles of water, and using the power of the Wind Waker – which gives Link the power to change the course of the wind – Link must venture out into the Big Blue and travel to different islands to find out who it is that's holding her captive.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS (2006)
When Link and his friends are attacked by a posse of monsters, Link wakes up to find his pals have been kidnapped. Miffed, he sets off to save them, and steps through the Twilight Realm where he's transformed into a wolf and imprisoned. He soon escapes, but learns that evil sorcerer Zant is trying to merge Hyrule with the Twilight Realm… spelling bad news for everyone, except for Zant.

Link would need to gather information from locals, laying down a foundation for the many games that would follow.

In 1990, a new Nintendo console was breaking into the market rapidly. An early and pivotal partnership with Capcom – securing the machine ports of both *Street Fighter II* and *Final Fight* – bolstered by an impressive debut by *Super Mario Bros* would have everyone eagerly anticipating the end of Link's four-year absence from videogames. And Nintendo certainly wouldn't disappoint. Released in 1991, and into a swathe of praise, *A Link To The Past* is cited by many fans as the seminal game in the prolific *Zelda* franchise.

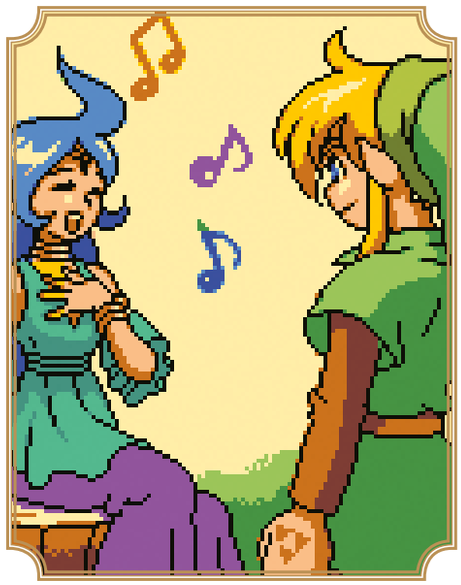
The first two *Zelda* stories were the creations of Miyamoto and fellow game designer Takashi Tezuka. However, for *A Link To The Past*, Miyamoto would enlist the writing talents of producer Kensuke Tanabe. Link's SNES debut would mark a return of the popular overhead look of the first game, as well as introducing some customary tweaks to the visuals and controls. Link could now move diagonally, run (with the aid of Pegasus Boots) and the range of his sword attack was also improved. Perhaps the most notable aspect came from the game's deft use of its items. There was the new Hookshot, which Link could use to stun his enemies and pull himself across large gaps in the ground, the Bow (which made an appearance in the first game but is used to greater effect here) and the Magic Mirror, which Link can use to shift between The Light World: a colourful and lush depiction of Hyrule, and The Dark World: a dank and nightmarish vision painted with skulls, oily looking marshes and menacing-looking trees. The game was packed with a dizzying array of side quests, sub-plots and gameplay.

A Link To The Past also marks the first time in the series that the game's three main protagonists: Link, Zelda and Ganon are not the same incarnations seen in the previous games. It's set hundreds of years before the first game – as flipping the back of the box states – our heroes are 'predecessors' to the original Link and Zelda, and this time-fudging has been a running theme throughout the series. The *Zelda* trend seems to be for Nintendo to release a *Zelda* game, set it in its own unique time and then

> **"For many fans, the series would never better A Link To The Past"**

follow it up with a quirky direct sequel. *Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link*, *Link's Awakening*, *Majora's Mask* and *Phantom Hourglass* are all direct sequels that adhere to this thinking. But for every third game, generally, the player will always be controlling a spiritual descendant of Link inside a game set in its own unique time; *A Link To The Past*, *Ocarina Of Time*, *The Wind Waker* again all back up this belief. It explains why it is that there's this peculiar sense that Nintendo are occasionally rewriting its story, and why characters in certain sequels react and communicate like they're meeting each other for the very first time.

For many, the series would never better *A Link To The Past*. And yet, despite the huge swathe of popularity that the game would glean, the Super Nintendo would receive only one Western *Zelda* game in its lifetime. Nintendo would still cash in on the game's popularity in the East by releasing two *Zelda*-based games on its Satellaview system – a peculiar



satellite modem for the SNES co-developed by Nintendo and Bandai. The first game, entitled *BS: The Legend Of Zelda*, was a downloadable four-part episodic remake of the original NES game but with a few subtle differences. First, the graphics and music were given a colourful facelift and a few elements of the gameplay (such as having it play out in real-time, and increasing the capacity of Link's rupee purse) were also tweaked. It's often cited as '*The Third Quest*', because of the way it messed with the dungeons, items and the size ratio of the Overworld.

To cunningly boost awareness of the Satellaview, Nintendo would also opt to supplant the system's two mascots – a boy in a baseball cap and a girl with red hair – in the shoes of protagonists instead of Link. In 1997, Nintendo released a follow-up to the game, *BS The Legend Of Zelda: The Sacred Stones*, which again divided the game into four-weekly downloadable chunks. *Sacred Stones* is considered to be side quest to *A Link To The Past*, owing to the look and feel of the game. It retained the two Satellaview mascots as before, and would set the player on a quest to find eight pieces of hallowed masonry and defeat a resurrected Ganon. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the Satellaview games is that, like an interactive television show, they could only be played while the game was being aired. This allowed Nintendo to broadcast hints and tips to the player while they played to help assist them on their quest.

As well as the Satellaview, it was always Nintendo's intention to produce a CD add-on for the Super Nintendo. Sony had developed the sound chip for the SNES (the SPC700) and had experience and grounding in CD technology, therefore, Nintendo's looking to Sony to get the project off the ground was really a case of natural selection. However, as the story goes, Sony was determined to break into the videogame market itself, and had seen an ideal opportunity to do so when that early contract with Nintendo was drawn up. During that deal Nintendo would unknowingly sign an agreement that would give Sony the rights to work on a CD-based console that would run both the planned SNES-CD games and also be backward compatible with SNES carts. In secret, Sony had been working on the console, named the Super Disc, and as that contract would enforce, it would legally play all SNES games. When Nintendo eventually caught wind of this, and realised that Sony would then hold the control, and (it's reputed) profits of all SNES-CD games, it would then side with Sony's rival Philips.

After a messy legal battle, Nintendo successfully found a way to pull out of the contract. But a resolute Sony would simply refine and rework its existing hardware, eventually rolling it out as the Sony PlayStation. After eventually dropping the idea of releasing a CD component for the SNES, Nintendo would give Philips use of two of its IPs for a series of videogames for its CDi machine. Mario and Luigi would cordially appear in the puzzle game *Hotel Mario*, and Link and pals in three interactive movie-games: *Link: The Faces Of Evil*, *Wand of Gamelon*, (released concurrently in 1993), and *Zelda's Adventure* (released a year later). The first two games (*Faces Of Evil* and *Wand of Gamelon*) were side-scrolling action games, à la *The Adventure Of Link*, but spliced up with dated-looking cartoon sequences. For *Zelda's Adventure*, the original top-down approach was adopted but the game filled its boots with poorly rendered CG sprites and astonishingly dire blue-screen acting. Not surprisingly, given the games' prolific heritage, the Philip's games were lambasted by the gaming press and fans of the series.

"Instead of thinking of it as making a game, think of it as nurturing a miniature garden called Hyrule," the words of Miyamoto about the making of *Ocarina Of Time*. Ironically, many fans of the popular series would view *Ocarina* not as a brilliant nurturing of Hyrule but as a brilliant nurturing of Link. Released in 1998, and built from a drastically modified version of the *Super Mario 64* engine, *Majora's Mask* chronicled the biggest shift in the series to date, the transition from a 2D to a 3D realm, and a longer period in Link's life. Starting out as a boy, between the age of eight and nine, we would see Link's quest lead him into adulthood. But it's clear what Miyamoto was hinting at. Technically jaw-dropping draw distances, real-time light sourcing and expansive environments that could be covered effortlessly on Link's steed Epona and an almost faultless camera and control system; it's true that the world of Hyrule was never so brilliantly fleshed out.

» Despite the criticism, we think *The Wind Waker* looks like a Pixar movie.

The Dark, the Pig and the Fabergé egg

HERE'S OUR COMPLETE RUNDOWN OF LINK'S MOST COMMON ADVERSARIES

Dark Link

Appeared as a villain in: *The Adventure Of Link, Ocarina Of Time, Oracle Of Ages, Four Swords Adventures* and *Twilight Princess*.

Dark Link (aka Shadow Link) is an ominous and mysterious villain that makes its first appearance as the final boss in *The Adventure Of Link*. Taking many different guises over the years – he's essentially an evil version of Link draped in darkness with glowing red eyes. Little is known about the origins of Dark Link, but if his appearance in *Ocarina Of Time* is anything to go by, then he seems symbiotic. So, if *Spider-Man 3* was factually accurate, we can assume he's an alien from outer space.

Ganon/Ganondorf Dragmire

Appeared as a villain in: *The Legend Of Zelda, The Adventure Of Link* (Game Over screen), *A Link To The Past, Ocarina Of Time*, the *Oracle* series, *The Wind Waker, Four Swords Adventures* and *Twilight Princess*.

Ganon is Link's first and most prolific adversary. Kicking things off at the end of *The Legend Of Zelda* as a giant pig, he would retain this porky form up until *Ocarina Of Time*, where he would show his true colours: as Ganondorf Dragmire. Ganondorf was the only male born into a guild of women thieves known as the Gerudo clan. Being the only male, he would become the 'King of Thieves' and would lead the Gerudo into taking over Hyrule. Without the power of the Moon Pearl to protect him, the Dark Realm would transform him into a powerful demon who resembles a pig, and he would take vengeance on Hyrule.

Vaati

Appeared as a villain in: *The Minish Cap, Four Swords* and *Four Swords Adventures*.

Vaati is the recurring villain of the *Four Swords* series, who, like Ganon/Ganondorf Dragmire, appears in many different forms. Beginning life as a lowly Minish (a race of fairy-like creatures) he would betray his master, Ezlo, by stealing his power cap and turning himself into a sorcerer. During the *Four Swords* series he can be seen in his original Minish form, his sorcerer shape and also three different variations of his demonic state; which look like a cluster of Fabergé eggs with demonic eyeballs painted on them. Absolutely terrifying.

The sequel to *Ocarina Of Time, Majora's Mask* (2000) introduced many firsts to the series. Originally titled '*Zelda: Gaiden*' in 1999, it was the first time, inside the main canon of games, that Nintendo would really break its Triforce of Character (the first game to do so was *Link's Awakening* on the Game Boy). *Majora's Mask* doesn't include any physical incarnation of Ganon (although his name is mentioned) and Zelda's appearance is relatively brief in relation to the prevailing games in the series. Beginning life as an intended extra-section of *Ocarina Of Time* (had the game been released on the Nintendo 64DD as originally intended), it heavily tweaked at the *Zelda* structure and messed with the series' familiar Hyrulian setting. As a result, many fans viewed it as the most jarring game in the series. The graphic style of *Majora* is essentially *Ocarina* refined, with many of the same elements wholesaled across. The biggest difference between the two N64 games is that in *Majora's Mask* Link doesn't age (although there's a mask in the game that makes it possible) and the whole episode is set over just three videogame days. Link's mission is to prevent the destruction of Termina (a slightly more sophisticated alternative vision of Hyrule) from an ominous moon that in three days will destroy the town. With only three 'days' until the game ends it was necessary for Link to keep travelling back in time, to the start of the first day, until his quest was complete. Oddly, despite the notion of time travel and rebirth being a strong mantra for the *Zelda* series, some would find it difficult to warm to *Majora's* confining time-travel structure, and view it as the most linear game in the series.

If there were some fans that found it difficult to warm to the direction of *Majora's Mask*, then the next *Zelda* game was always destined to put a few noses out of joint. After the infamous *Legend of Zelda: Space World* GameCube demo in 2000, which showed an impressively rendered sword fight between Link and Ganon, its sinewy graphical style of an adult Link had many fans believing they were going to get a darker *Zelda* adventure. However, the game they eventually got would look nothing like the teasing demo unveiled to Space World attendees. Taking the biggest shift in terms of visual style, *The Wind Waker*'s cel-shaded graphics would disgruntle fans who were expecting an epic and mature *Zelda* appendage. Ironically though, perhaps the biggest shift in the game came from its scrapping of certain *Zelda* gameplay elements. Instead of time travel, *The Wind Waker* uses the wind and the ocean for its puzzle and explorative elements, and rather than one large land to explore, it's split into islands connected by miles of sea that Link must traverse by sailboat. But *Wind Waker* also had a sense of humour, and took many aspects from the portable *Zelda* games, with more emphasis on characters and a feeling of being more accessible for newcomers. Its effusive and simple anime-style graphics captured the facial expressions of its characters better than any *Zelda* game before it, going lengths to invoke emotion, a real connection with Link, and cleverly serving as subtle hints to the player to help them solve puzzles. In a bid to perhaps soften that visual blow to its fans, Nintendo would accompany the game with a bonus disc containing the original *Ocarina Of Time* and *Ocarina Of Time/Master Quest* – a more arduous version of the N64 game that was intended to be released for the 64DD.

Perhaps due to its basic look, the next *Zelda* game to appear on the Cube came and went with generally little fanfare.

The A-Z of Zelda

A is for A Link To The Past
Link's seminal *Zelda* adventure and a firm fan favourite

B is for Ballad Of The Wind Fish
The song which Link must play to rouse the Wind Fish.

C is for Crossbow Training
Link's Crossbow Training is a peculiar lightgun spin-off of *Twilight Princess* that comes bundled with the Wii Zapper.

D is for Death Mountain
The home of Link's evil arch nemesis Ganon.

E is for Epona
The name of Link's noble steed.

F is for Four Swords trilogy
A series of three spin-off *Zelda* games – *A Link To The Past & Four Swords, Four Swords Adventures* and *The Minish Cap* – that are all linked by The Four Sword.

G is for Ganon
Begins life as a pig with a pitchfork, later games would reveal his true form: Ganondorf Dragmire.

H is for Hyrule
The fictional land where the majority of *Zelda* games take place.

I is for Impa
Impa is the caretaker of Princess Zelda, and the old woman that Link saves in *The Legend Of Zelda*.

J is for Jabber Nut
The nut that Link must eat to understand the Minish language.

K is for Koholint
The setting of *Link's Awakening*, marks the first time a *Zelda* game wouldn't be set in Hyrule.

L is for Link
Steadfast, brave, full of gusto and dressed in green, the pointy-eared Link is the saviour of Hyrule.

Developed by Nintendo, *The Legend Of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures* took visual and multiplayer elements from the GBA game, *A Link To The Past & Four Swords* (see 'A Link To The Palm' boxout), and brought an entirely new squad-based dynamic to the series. Slotting weirdly between two Game Boy Advance games, *Four Swords Adventures* would form the second game of *Zelda*'s *Four Swords* trilogy. It allowed one to four players (if you had a linkup cable and knew three people with a GBA) to control four differing coloured Links, position them into various formations and tier off to work together to solve the game's colour and teamwork-themed puzzles. The multiplayer emphasis of the game was further bolstered by a unique battle mode that allowed four friends to select a Link and duel to the death.

The next game to appear in Nintendo's popular series was the engaging *Twilight Princess*, a game that famously carried the weight of two consoles on its shoulders. After a one year delay, *Twilight Princess* would prove a fantastic farewell to the GameCube, but sadly a tepid and awkward debut for the Wii. With *The Wind Waker*, Nintendo's intention was to make a *Zelda* game that anyone could finish, and as a result many fans would bemoan the game for being far too easy. So Nintendo looked back to *Ocarina* as the blueprint for the style and direction for *Twilight Princess*. Running from a heavily tweaked *Wind Waker* engine, *Twilight Princess* looks to be the polar opposite to its GameCube sibling. In hindsight, it's actually a culmination of ideas and themes from the later *Zelda* games. It clearly borrows from *Ocarina Of Time* in terms of its visuals, adopts the darker undertones of *Majora's Mask*, and boasts the scale and subtle gameplay tweaks of *Wind Waker* – with regard to its cinematic look and continued use of facial expressions.

It was decided, mid-development, that the graphical style of the game would be altered. Early shots of the game showing Link inside a grey and desaturated world would reaffirm to fans that *Twilight Princess* was to be a darker direction for the series. However, the eventual graphical style would shift to a hazy world made of warm serene palettes, but that darker direction was kept. The game also contained more dungeons and more items than *Ocarina Of Time*, as was the intention by Nintendo to finally offer the hardcore *Zelda* fan a game to really test their mettle. While the Wii version is essentially an enhanced port of the GameCube release, the game would actually play out slightly differently; the game worlds were mirrored. Link has always been left-handed in the game, and if you were to look closely at the series, you'll notice that whatever direction Link (which, incidentally, means 'left' in German) is facing he will hold his sword in his left hand. With the advent of the Wii-remote controls in *Twilight Princess*, Nintendo realised that many players would be right-handed so would make Link enantiomorphic in the Wii version, and the game world would follow suit.

With the exception of *Link's Crossbow Training*, a short game packed in with the Wii Zapper as a means of demonstrating the peripheral, Link would not return to the Wii for several years. In the meantime, the cartoonish Link of *Wind Waker* and *Minish Cap* continued to adventure on the Nintendo DS. The first of these was *Phantom Hourglass*, a direct successor to *Wind Waker* which retained much of the game's seafaring action. Link's pirate pal Tetra goes missing after the pair happen upon a ghost ship, which kickstarts a quest to save the girl and uncover the mystery of the phantom vessel. The biggest change here was a touchscreen control method that saw players directing Link and even performing combat moves using the stylus. Though some players disliked the lack of a traditional scheme using the D-pad and buttons, *Phantom Hourglass* received critical acclaim and sold over 4.1 million copies.

Given that success, it's unsurprising that the *Zelda* series returned to the DS in 2009 with *Spirit Tracks* – and once again, the stylus was the main input device. Instead of sailing the high seas, Link now found himself riding the rails as a train engineer with a mean sideline in swordplay, trying to discover why the titular

» Yep, even *Zelda* couldn't avoid a clichéd runaway mine section.

M is for Majora's Mask
An evil heart-shaped mask is what Link needs to save Termina.

N is for Nintendo
Nintendo is the creator of *Zelda* and the Walt Disney of videogames.

O is for Ocarina
The flute-type musical instrument that makes its first appearance in *Link's Awakening*.

P is for Pikmin
Like Pikmin, Miyamoto wanted Hyrule to feel like a virtual garden.

Q is for Quiver
The quiver is the item that holds Link's arrows.

R is for Rupees
The ruby-like currency of *Zelda* that Link can acquire by killing enemies and cutting the grass.

S is for Satellaview
The SNES equivalent of Xbox Live, only released in Japan, home to two *Zelda*-based games.

T is for Triforce
This is the sacred triangular relic that binds the characters and events of *Zelda* together.

U is for Underworld
The term for the underground dungeons beneath Hyrule.

V is for Vaati
Is the villain in the *Four Swords* series. Like Ganon he takes two forms: a human sorcerer and a giant bat eye with pincers.

W is for Wind Waker
Wind Waker was the first *Zelda* game for the GameCube, and marked a dramatic shift in the visual style of the franchise.

X is for X-rated action
It's implied throughout the series that Link and Zelda are romantically involved. If only they could remember.

Y is for Yoshi
Yoshi appears in *Link's Awakening* as a sought-after cuddly toy that Link must win.

Z is for Zelda: Gaiden
Was the original working title for *Majora's Mask*.

» *Hyrule Warriors* allowed players to control a variety of characters in combat, including Princess Zelda herself.

» The *Zelda* series was chosen to demonstrate the Wii Zapper in *Link's Crossbow Training*.

Spirit Tracks that connected the kingdom were disappearing. Though this might seem a little out of place in a series that has usually had a fantasy focus and not drawn too much attention to technology, director Daiki Iwamoto was deliberately aiming for a different feeling to a regular *Zelda* game. The result was another success, though with 2.6 million sales it didn't quite match up to its predecessor's popularity.

Though Link's next game was not a new one, it generated considerable excitement as it was a remake of the game many still considered to be the greatest in the series. *Ocarina Of Time 3D* was a full visual overhaul of the N64 game for the 3DS, designed to take advantage of the added sense of depth offered by the new handheld hardware. The game was both a critical triumph and a sales success, selling over a million copies, but bigger things were coming as the *Zelda* series was about to return to the home console arena.

The Wii received *Skyward Sword* in 2011, making it a relatively late release in the console's life. Though *Skyward Sword* was not nearly as dark in tone as *Twilight Princess*, it didn't veer back into the overt cartoonishness of the cel-shaded *Wind Waker*. The tone was instead pitched closest to that of *Ocarina Of Time*, with a slightly more vibrant colour palette. The game is also the earliest in the *Zelda* story chronology, with Link and Zelda cast as childhood friends. When Zelda is kidnapped and taken down to the Surface, Link becomes entangled in the evil Ghirahim's plot to free the demon king Demise, and must prevent it to save Zelda and the world.

In order to add extra precision to the Wii controller's motion sensing capabilities, *Skyward Sword* made use of the Wii MotionPlus add-on. The more accurate tracking played heavily into combat, with the Wii controller used for the sword itself and the shield controlled using the Wii Nunchuk. Likewise, the bow was now fired by pulling the remote back as you would the string in actual archery, and bombs could be rolled towards targets like bowling balls. Despite some reservations over the implementation of this new scheme, as well as a feeling that the rest of the game development community was finally beginning to catch up to the 3D *Zelda* mechanics, most reviewers were overwhelmingly positive about the game and it sold millions in short order.

Though the Wii was succeeded by the Wii U in late 2012, there was no early *Zelda* release, so GameCube remasters were released to plug the gap, *Wind Waker HD* in 2013 and *Twilight Princess HD* in 2016. Instead, new developments would take place on the 3DS, though they would also mine the past for inspiration. *A Link Between Worlds* was released in 2013 and served as a proper sequel to the SNES classic *A Link To The Past*. Link's task was to prevent the theft of Hyrule's triforce by the inhabitants of the parallel world of Lorule, who seek to restore their kingdom after it falls into decay due to the destruction of their own Triforce. One fun mechanic introduced here was the ability to merge onto walls as a mural, allowing Link to cross otherwise impassable gaps and explore further than he could otherwise. It was a rather excellent game and went on to sell over 2.5 million copies.

"Breath Of The Wild carried a new piece of hardware to glory"

The next game to release was *Majora's Mask 3D*, another 3DS remake in the fashion of the previous *Ocarina of Time 3D*. This sold over 2 million copies and was easily the most exciting *Zelda* development of 2015, as the year's other 3DS release was a rare misstep for the series. *Tri Force Heroes* focused on multiplayer cooperation in a similar manner to the prior *Four Swords* games, and allowed players the option to play alone, via local wireless and even online. However, communication options were limited and the game was stifled by its need to cater to the friendless, with few challenges truly testing a truly organised team. Additionally, much of the design was lifted from prior *Zelda* games with little innovation. Likewise, the spin-off *Hyrule Warriors* on Wii U was little more than the *Dynasty Warriors* games with a new skin, though it was popular enough to see 3DS and Switch conversions and is a lot of fun to play.

A lack of innovation is not something that troubled the most recent major game in the series. Though it began life as a Wii U game and was revealed as such in 2014, *Breath Of The Wild* ended up carrying a new piece of hardware to glory, as the Nintendo Switch ended up as the system that most players

Evolving Zelda

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: BREATH OF THE WILD HAS REINVENTED THE SERIES FOR A NEW AGE – HERE'S HOW...

1 Climbing is a major part of traversing the new open world – but Link will need enough stamina to reach the summit

2 If you see an enemy with a deadly weapon, you can steal it once they're defeated, but it might not last long

3 These items can be picked up and used to craft new items, for example by cooking delicious and health-replenishing meals

4 Hyrule is bigger than ever, and you'll need to climb towers in order to reveal new points of interest on the map

5 Link's clothes can be changed, both to increase his defensive protection and to guard against the elements in harsh weather conditions

6 If it gets too hot or too cold, Link will begin to take damage, but this can be mitigated by using the right items

would use to experience it. Eventually released in 2017, the game served as a radical reinvention of the *Zelda* series, taking the game's trademark mechanics and fitting them into an open-world game design that draws strong influences from games such as *Assassin's Creed*. This game saw Link awakening from a long slumber to find a world in ruins, having been sealed away by Zelda following a heavy defeat by Ganon. In order to end the tyrant's influence over Hyrule, Link's goal was to defeat the Divine Beasts that had been corrupted by Ganon, release the spirits of the kingdom's champions and then defeat Ganon himself. *Breath Of The Wild* was a critical success and also the best-selling *Zelda* game ever, with over 10.8 million copies sold. It's going to be interesting to see what Nintendo's popular franchise does next.

So what is it that makes the *Zelda* series so popular? Why does every new chapter create such an air of excitement surrounding a cloud of high expectations? Why do people meticulously dissect every screenshot, analyse and pore over every *Zelda*-related rumour and await the next chapter more so than any other videogame franchise to date? Miyamoto sums it up perfectly. "I think many people dream about becoming heroes", he told Superplay magazine in 2003. "For me it has always been important that the gamers grow together with Link, that there is a strong relationship between the one who holds the controller and the person on the screen. I have always tried to create the feeling that you really are in Hyrule. If you don't feel that way, it will lose some of its magic." ✱

» Dungeons remained an integral part of the DS *Zelda* games, in spite of other changes.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Kirby's Fun Pak

» **PLATFORM:** SNES » **DEVELOPER:** HAL LABORATORY » **RELEASED:** 1996

Being able to inhale enemies and copy their abilities is a pretty neat trick, we'd say. Kirby's signature move is one which serves him well throughout the series, but *Kirby's Fun Pak* added a brand-new spin on it which completely changed the way we played. Once you've gulped down a baddie and nicked its powers, a quick press of the A button sacrifices that ability. Why on Earth would you do that? To create a Helper, of course. These guys look like your enemies, but function as autonomous drones dedicated to aiding Kirby during an adventure. A second player can even join in the fun by taking control of the Helper.

There are lots of situations in which Helpers are useful, but we particularly love dropping them into the fray during boss battles. Why risk your own hide when Poppy Bros Jr is willing to get up in Wispy Woods' face and lob bombs at him? You can sit back and dodge falling apples as your formerly antagonistic buddy does all the work. Marvellous.

BIO

While Kirby was firmly established with Game Boy and NES platformers by 1996, the pink puffball had only starred in spin-offs on Nintendo's flagship SNES. While *Kirby's Dream Course* and *Kirby's Ghost Trap* were fine games, *Kirby's Fun Pak* was the game that players had dreamed of – not only did it feature a multitude of excellent platform adventures, it also added some neat minigames. The result was a critical and commercial success, selling over a million copies and generally being considered one of the best games in the series, as well as a late treat for SNES owners before the N64 arrived.

MORE CLASSIC KIRBY'S FUN PAK MOMENTS

Gourmet Race

Kirby just loves to eat stuff. King Dedede is quite fond of thwarting Kirby. This natural conflict leads to one of the best games in *Kirby's Fun Pak*, the Gourmet Race. Kirby and his rival race to eat the most food, accompanied by an unforgettable bit of chase music that receives regular play in the **Retro Gamer** office… especially on deadline day.

Megaton Punch

It might just involve timing three button presses well, but there's an undeniable satisfaction to this simple minigame. Perhaps it's the fact that you're punching the ground so hard that it fractures the world. Perhaps it's the fact that in this case, all that force comes from a diminutive pink blob. We just know we like it.

The Big Treasure

There's treasure to be found everywhere in The Great Cave Offensive – the only problem is that it's not always obvious how to access it. After a little bit of lateral thinking, though, you'll often find that it's easier than you thought – and if you get a massive reward at the end of that process, all the better!

Manic Maze

This small puzzle section of The Great Cave Offensive requires you to be quick on the D-pad, as you'll need to hit buttons in the right order and then scramble through the doors that you have activated before they close sut again. It's tricky and will take a few goes, but that makes it all the more memorable.

IT'S A KNOCK-

THE HISTORY OF PUNCH-OUT!!

Punch-Out!! has everything that people love from the boxing ring – hard-hitting fights, larger than life characters and an underdog to cheer. Nick Thorpe tackles three decades of Nintendo's distinctive style of boxing action…

OUT!!

Boxing has a funny history when it comes to videogames. While the sport formed the basis of the very first one-on-one fighting games such as Sega's Seventies arcade title *Heavyweight Champ*, it has rarely made for games which are particularly popular in the sports or fighting genres, even when legendary heavyweights are plying their trade. While it could be argued that boxing games struggle because they can't provide the varied fighters and styles of the more outlandish fighting games, the *Punch-Out!!* series is a solid counter to that argument.

Punch-Out!! was born not from a specific desire within Nintendo to make a boxing game, but from a combination of external factors. When *Punch-Out!!* was being developed in 1983, laserdisc games were making their breakthrough in arcades, headed by *Dragon's Lair*. Having experienced issues with its video-based electromechanical game *EVR Race* in the mid-Seventies, Nintendo was wary of taking on the heavy maintenance burden that was associated with video hardware, but recognised a need to deliver impressive visuals to compete with the emerging products. The company began to investigate new sprite handling technology as a result and it was in luck – scaling and rotation of sprites had become possible. However, given the limitations of the hardware, only a single sprite could be manipulated, and it couldn't have both scaling and rotation applied at the same time. ▶

Punch-Out!!

The other factor was a stock problem. The massive success of *Donkey Kong* had caused Nintendo to buy monitors at the same rate it was selling the game, but as sales died down the company was left with a large amount of excess monitors. To clear the stock, the decision was made to create an arcade game that utilised two monitors. This presented a problem for Nintendo – what kind of game could use only a single scaling object? After an attempt to create a racing game on side-by-side monitors failed, inspiration struck. A boxer only ever has one opponent, making the sport perfect fodder for the developing hardware. A second screen was hardly necessary, but could be employed to emphasise the pageantry surrounding the sport – the lights, the big electronic displays, banners and more. Plus, it would keep the main screen free of clutter, allowing the visuals to achieve the desired impact.

Much of the unique feel of *Punch-Out!!* can be attributed to two key members of staff – game designer Genyo Takeda and artist Shigeru Miyamoto. Takeda's vision was that the game should be heavily targeted towards the American market – not only was the USA the centre of the boxing world, its arcade scene was huge. The first idea that Takeda had to differentiate the game was a realistic control scheme using boxing gloves. This ultimately fell by the wayside, with Miyamoto stating a preference for traditional joystick controls when asked – an ironic turn of events, given his later belief in the intuitive nature of motion control. The final game shipped with a joystick and three buttons. More successful was Takeda's desire to create memorable characters, as he came up with English names that conveyed the characteristics of each fighter – Glass Joe had a weak jaw while Bald Bull's signature attack saw him charge towards the player. Even the character voices were provided by members of staff at Nintendo of America, too.

» Being so large, characters were able to show more distinct facial expressions that brought the battles to life.

> "It made it all the more satisfying when you eventually knock out a huge opponent"
>
> Makoto Wada

The original designs for the characters themselves were the work of Miyamoto, who was still in Nintendo's art-focused Planning Department. At the time, the company was experimenting with technology that would allow it to create sprites from scanned images, and Miyamoto lacked confidence in his ability to deliver the quality of art required for the game. As a result, Nintendo sought the services of noted animation company Studio Junio to produce the individual frames of animation for each boxer. The scanning technology wasn't quite ready though, and Miyamoto and his assistant had to draw giant pixel images on graph paper based on the animation cells provided by Studio Junio. He also managed to sneak Mario and Donkey Kong into the crowd, which would sow the seeds for an interesting secret in a later game. *Punch-Out!!* didn't have the incredible visuals of the laserdisc games it hoped to compete with – it never could have done – but it certainly made a big impression on its own terms.

***Punch-Out!!* also delivered on the gameplay front. Each fight consisted of a single three-minute round in which you had to knock out your opponent. This required carefully timing** dodges left and right to avoid your opponent's punch – you could see when they were about to strike, as the whites of their eyes flashed yellow – then punishing them while their guard was down. Landing a series of successful blows filled up the KO bar, allowing you to unleash a much more powerful uppercut. Successfully defeating an opposing fighter would allow you to move on to the next one, with the game looping in a title defence mode after you defeat the sixth, the world champion Mr Sandman.

Aided by a trade show debut that included a presentation by reigning heavyweight champion Larry Holmes, *Punch-Out!!* was a major success. Demand for a sequel came swiftly, and *Super Punch-Out!!* was put into production. In many respects, Nintendo chose not to fix the game as it clearly wasn't broken. Only one major change was made to the gameplay – the inclusion of the ability to duck by pulling the joystick

» Dragon Chan's kicks are incredibly damaging and must be avoided with the new duck move.

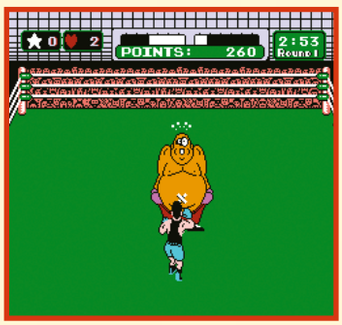
outwards, as if you were trying to remove it from the machine. With the gameplay sorted out, the other major factor in the success of *Punch-Out!!* could be addressed – characters.

Super Punch-Out!! included five fighters rather than the six of the original, but these guys were rather different and more challenging. The characters in *Punch-Out!!* were standard boxers – they wore trunks and threw pretty standard punches, and were all of a similar build. From the moment you first took to the ring in *Super Punch-Out!!*, Bear Hugger proved that this was no longer the case. The dungaree-clad Canadian fighter was gargantuan, absorbed body blows without issue and attacked with a double-handed chop unlike anything actually seen in a boxing ring. Other fighters followed suit – Dragon Chan was modelled on Bruce Lee and actually leapt onto the ropes to deliver a flying kick to the player, for example. The approach worked well, further establishing the fact that characters were an important part of the series.

Aided by the art scanning tool that had been intended for the original game, *Super Punch-Out!!* was produced in a matter of months and earned similar praise to its predecessor upon its release late in 1984. *Arm Wrestling*, a spin-off product whose main tie to the *Punch-Out!!* series was an appearance by Bald Bull as the mysterious Mask X, followed in 1985. It never achieved the same success as the *Punch-Out!!* games and would be Nintendo's last original arcade game, as it transitioned to focus wholly on the home market. With the Famicom firmly established in Japan and the NES making waves in the USA, the decision was made in 1986 to give *Punch-Out!!* a home version.

From the start, it became clear that it couldn't be a straight conversion. "With the arcade version we had these amazing battles with real impact, where two huge characters would fight each other. It was a challenge trying to re-create this on the NES," explains Makoto Wada, who had only recently joined Nintendo as a character designer during the production of *Punch-Out!!* for the NES. "Instead of trying to draw both the player and opponent characters so large, we just focused on showing off the size of the opponent. This lead to the player-character becoming really small, which actually made it all the more satisfying when you eventually KO this huge opponent. Incidentally this is also how the player-character got his name, *Little* Mac."

It wasn't just the visuals that changed – a number of changes were made to gameplay, in order to add depth for the home market. Matches moved to a three-round structure and the KO bar was removed, with uppercuts now earned by countering opponents' punches with blows ▶



» Makoto Wada's favourite character, King Hippo, has a very noticeable vulnerability…

» The training scene with Doc Louis has become an iconic image of the *Punch-Out!!* series.

THE CONTENDERS

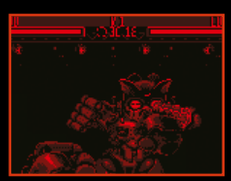
Punch-Out!! has inspired a number of imitators over the years – we sort the champs from the chumps

FRANK BRUNO'S BOXING 1985

■ Take three of the fighters from *Super Punch-Out!!*, add a popular British heavyweight and you have an 8-bit micro success. What's not clear is if the pseudo-conversion actually has anything to do with Nintendo – despite the use of its characters, it isn't credited in the game or on the packaging…

POWER PUNCH II 1992

■ Originally titled *Mike Tyson's Intergalactic Power Punch*, American Softworks needed to rebrand the game when Tyson was convicted of rape. Claims that this game was originally intended as an official *Punch-Out!!* sequel have never been substantiated, but it's confirmed that the game itself is a dud.



TELEROBOXER 1995

■ This one's an actual Nintendo production, which plays a lot like *Punch-Out!!* but looks more like *Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robots*. It poses a notably stiff challenge, but is one of the most visually impressive Virtual Boy games, due to its excellent use of sprites to create a potentially headache-inducing 3D effect.

WADE HIXTON'S COUNTER PUNCH 2004

■ This GBA release is a bit of a hidden gem – it borrows its gameplay from the *Punch-Out!!* series and shares a similar emphasis on characters. The handheld's 2D power allows for some gigantic sprites with fantastic animation reminiscent of a Saturday morning cartoon.

MIKE TYSON: MAIN EVENT 2011

■ This iOS game clearly took aim at the *Punch-Out!!* series, even getting the Mike Tyson licence to match. It looked rather like a Flash game and didn't quite have the characters down, but since it was a free-to-play digital release that has been de-listed, you can't play it anymore.

Punch-Out!!

» Little Mac's new look didn't last for very long, only appearing in *Super Punch-Out!!* and a single cameo.

▶ of your own. A new mechanic was also introduced in the form of hearts representing Little Mac's fighting spirit. Swinging wildly was discouraged, as each miss or blocked punch would deplete hearts. Reaching zero would cause Little Mac to become tired and unable to punch, requiring him to dodge blows for a brief period.

Alongside returning characters from the arcade games such as Bald Bull and Vodka Drunkenski – now renamed Soda Popinski, in line with Nintendo's family-friendly policies – were a batch of new creations including Von Kaiser and Don Flamenco. "My favourite is King Hippo," Wada tells us. "He seems a little out of place when you look at the game overall, but as this was one of my first jobs I am really emotionally invested in it." To help figure out their patterns, Little Mac gained corner man Doc Louis, who would give hints during the breaks between rounds.

One of the most memorable aspects of the NES game was the inclusion of Mike Tyson, an idea that came from Nintendo of America president Minoru Arakawa, who had been impressed with the fighter's performance after seeing him live. It would prove to be a major marketing coup – Tyson was the undefeated, undisputed heavyweight champion of the world, and the game's October 1987 release coincided with a successful title defence. As well as appearing on the box and in TV adverts for the game, Tyson served as the game's final, most challenging fighter in the Dream Match round. "I will never forget knocking out Mike Tyson in the basement of my childhood home," recalls Mike Inglehart, who worked as a game director on *Punch-Out!!* for the Wii. "It was one of the moments where you scream out and run around the room in celebration, he must have knocked me out well over a hundred times before I helped Little Mac capture the title."

Though Mike Tyson's *Punch-Out!!* was well-received by the public and sold over a million copies, Tyson's personal problems attracted press attention over the following years. He later lost his undisputed heavyweight championship in a major upset to James 'Buster' Douglas in February 1990. Faced with a star it no longer wished to be associated with but a game it still wished to sell, Nintendo released a revised version of the game simply titled *Punch-Out!!* in the summer of 1990. The new version featured a new final opponent in the form of Mr Dream, who was simply Tyson with a redrawn head. Having beaten everyone there was to beat on the NES, Little Mac went on hiatus for a few years.

"We had to make the player-character smaller out of necessity for the NES, but we weren't satisfied with this," explains the producer when asked about the next game. Released for the SNES, *Super Punch-Out!!* was a loose adaptation of its arcade namesake, with the more powerful hardware allowing Wada and his team to sidestep the compromises required on the NES seven years earlier. "With the SNES version we could finally draw the player's character larger as well, so we went back to a larger sized 'Medium Mac' and it started to look a lot more like the arcade version," Wada recalls.

In fact, while the SNES was unable to replicate the scaling of the arcade fighters, it managed to visually exceed the original game in most areas. Sprites were more detailed and colourful, while Little Mac himself was now transparent, negating the need for a wire-frame fighter. That wasn't the only change to Little Mac's design, though – while prototype screenshots and videos show him exhibiting a look similar to his standard appearance, the final game features a full redesign with mousey brown hair.

With the game's perspective shifted back to the arcade style, much of the gameplay also reverted. Gone were the hearts and stars of the NES game, with the KO bar from the arcade making its return. The main mechanical addition over the arcade version was the ability to regain health while an opponent was knocked down by mashing ▶

"I will never forget knocking out Mike Tyson in the basement of my childhood home"

Mike Inglehart

» Mid-match trainer comments were a new feature in the SNES game, and occasionally helped to figure out opponents.

BATTLE FOR THE BELT

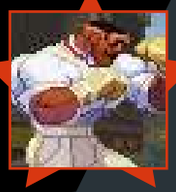
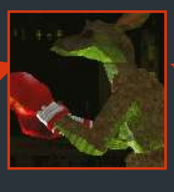
Eight of gaming's finest boxers have lined up for the chance to claim **Retro Gamer**'s heavyweight championship – who will come out on top?

ROUND 1

LITTLE MAC VS TJ COMBO

■ The *Killer Instinct* ring general takes control early, landing a series of devastating lefts and rights in quick succession. However, Little Mac regains his composure, ducks left and lands a devastating counter uppercut, knocking out TJ and causing a nutter with a megaphone to shout "combo breaker!"

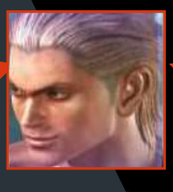
WINNER: LITTLE MAC

DUDLEY VS ROGER

■ A man of class and sophistication, Dudley is utterly aghast at what he sees in the ring before him – a boxing kangaroo, of all things? Not over-thinking matters due to being a kangaroo, Roger begins his ridiculous wind-up punch, letting fly just as Dudley steps through the ropes – one-hit KO.

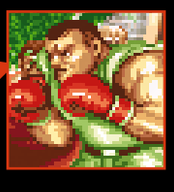
WINNER: ROGER



ROCKY BALBOA VS STEVE FOX

■ In a battle of youth against experience, Steve Fox quickly gains the upper hand. However, just like Apollo Creed he finds that despite his greater skill and punching power, he can't put Rocky down. The two go the distance, but Rocky wins a controversial split decision that has the crowd in uproar.

WINNER: ROCKY BALBOA

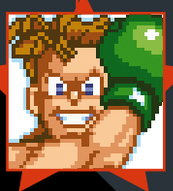
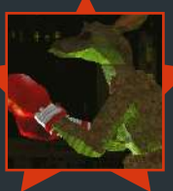


MIKE TYSON VS BALROG

■ The tension in the crowd is palpable as these two stare each other down, but what promises to be a titanic clash quickly turns into utter disappointment. After Tyson off-handedly asks Balrog if he used to go by a different name, the *Street Fighter* star flees the ring shouting something about lawyers...

WINNER: MIKE TYSON

ROUND 2

LITTLE MAC VS ROGER

■ Roger comes into the match relaxed and with little to fear, since he is a kangaroo. However, Little Mac is no stranger to odd opponents and has years of practice in reading telegraphed punches. As Roger winds up for his devastating punch, Mac ducks and responds with a fierce combo.

WINNER: LITTLE MAC

ROCKY BALBOA VS MIKE TYSON

■ A win just isn't in the script for Rocky tonight – the baddest man on the planet is all over Rocky from the bell, and the match quickly becomes one-sided. There's no Hollywood comeback for Balboa though, as he hits the canvas before the two-minute mark and stays there.

WINNER: MIKE TYSON

FINAL ROUND

LITTLE MAC VS MIKE TYSON

■ Tyson lets fly with a vicious flurry to open the bout, but Little Mac's footwork is equal to it. At least, it is initially. You've run the simulation a hundred times over and you know that Little Mac can win, but this isn't that one victory you achieved – this is the 99 times you lost. Tyson characteristically flattens the underdog, becoming **Retro Gamer**'s first world champion in the process.

WINNER: MIKE TYSON

Punch-Out!!

RANK OUTSIDERS

Punch-Out!! spin-off Arm Wrestling isn't the only game to drastically differ from its source material…

PROFESSOR PAC-MAN 1983

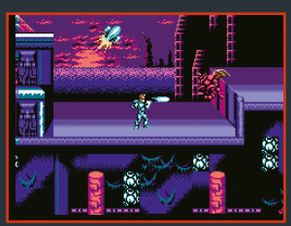
This arcade quiz game was the first time Pac-Man had ever ventured out of his traditional maze environment. It quickly became apparent that the audience was not responding to the game at all well. As a result, few cabinets were manufactured and the majority were returned, making this a rare game.

FANTASY ZONE: THE MAZE 1987

It's not entirely clear why Sega decided to make a maze game out of its cutesy shoot-'em-up series, launching it only a couple of months after *Fantasy Zone II: The Tears Of Opa-Opa*. We can only assume it was due to *Opa-Opa*'s popularity in Japan during the mid-Eighties…

STREET FIGHTER 2010 1990

Shortly before it unleashed one of the best sequels ever, Capcom launched this awful run-and-gun platform spin-off of the original fighting game. American localisation changed main character Kevin Straker's name to Ken, further solidifying the connection. Needless to say, everyone at Capcom wants to forget this.

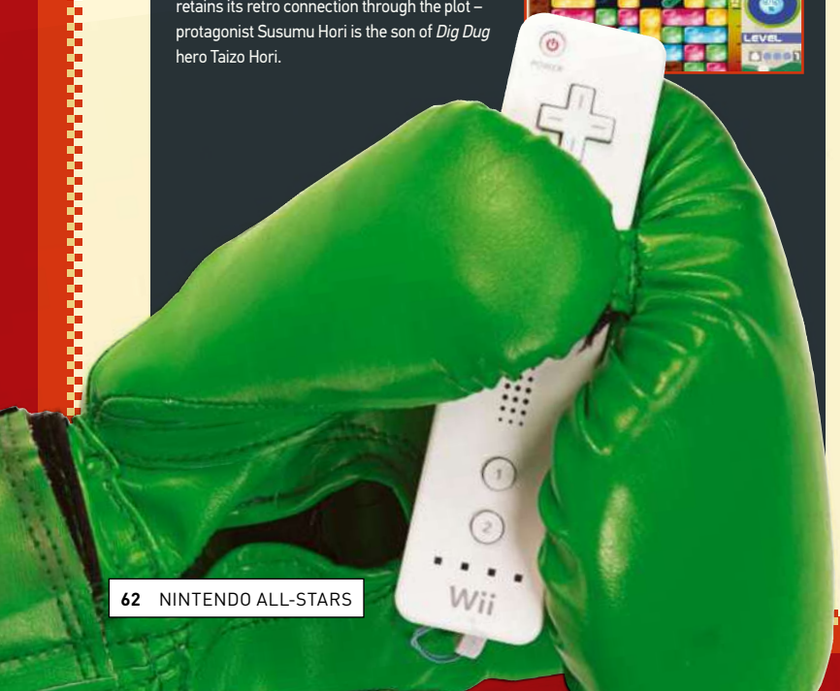


CHICAGO SYNDICATE 1995

At one point, Sega was convinced that its fighting series *Eternal Champions* was going to be the next big thing. It was in fact so convinced that it started to release spin-off games in 1995, the first of which was this Game Gear scrolling beat-'em-up starring professional thief Larcen Tyler.

MR DRILLER 1999

Allegedly developed under the working title of *Dig Dug 3*, *Mr Driller* veered away from the action template of the original arcade classic and became an action-puzzle hybrid. The game retains its retro connection through the plot – protagonist Susumu Hori is the son of *Dig Dug* hero Taizo Hori.



» The 3D visuals of the Wii game really allowed the likes of King Hippo to come to life.

▶ buttons. However, as had happened in the NES game, a variety of fighters were added to provide long-term value. Of the game's 16 characters only five originated in the arcade games, with the new creations providing a rather diverse range of styles. Masked Muscle is a Mexican wrestler that spits water in your face and headbutts you, while Mad Clown lobs juggling balls at you.

Super Punch-Out!! received a good critical reception upon its release in 1994. The music was generally felt to be less strong than that of its predecessor, but most reviewers praised the game for its tight control and strong sense of character – indeed, the personality of each fighter was so pronounced that *Super Play* noted "you almost feel guilty pummelling the sagging flesh of the first opponent." It was commonly noted that the game had the gentlest difficulty curve of the *Punch-Out!!* series, which wasn't necessarily a bad thing. But despite another strong showing Little Mac appeared to fade away into retirement following *Super Punch-Out!!*, only briefly emerging for cameo appearances.

As a result, surprise and joy were the main reactions that greeted the announcement of a new *Punch-Out!!* for the Wii. Development was handled by Canada's Next Level Games, which had previously handled the *Super Mario Strikers* series for Nintendo. "It was a huge privilege to be given the keys to such a huge Nintendo franchise so we wanted to make sure that we brought forward the best aspect of the original games," explains Mike. "We spent a lot of time dissecting each of the respective versions and decided that the controls from the NES version were the tightest and made the most sense for a translation, not to mention that all players had to do was turn their Wii remote sideways and you had the NES controller in your hand."

As a result, the game was much closer to the NES version than the other games in the series, returning the stars and hearts that were previously unique to that game. In fact, new additions in gameplay terms were quite light – the implementation of motion controls was inevitable, but the main one was an unexpected multiplayer mode. This split-screen battle saw two Little Macs slug it out until one transforms into the hulking Giga Mac, a fighter closer to the main cast than the familiar plucky underdog.

The decision to go light on new mechanics allowed the Next Level team to focus on character. The new cel-shaded 3D visuals contributed to realising this vision, as did a title defence mode in which fighters addressed their weaknesses in hilarious ways, such as King Hippo protecting his stomach with a manhole cover. Particular effort was put into conveying each character's personality through voice acting, as Mike explains. "We took the text-based chatter that was used in the older versions and gave each character a voice in their native tongue, so Glass Joe fearfully asked for mercy in French while Bald Bull yelled at you in Turkish." Mike himself

» Multiplayer is a split-screen affair for the most part, with each player controlling a Little Mac.

provided voice work, appearing as Super Macho Man.

While the game only added one new cast member in the form of Disco Kid, long-term spectator Donkey Kong finally emerged from the crowd as a surprise challenger. "Nintendo loves secrets in games and the idea came from them during development," Mike reveals. "Whenever I play Nintendo games I expect surprises and this feature design met that criteria. I don't think a single player expected it!"

Next Level's decision to stick to the popular formula proved to be a wise one, as *Punch-Out!!* received excellent reviews upon its release in May 2009. The familiarity and authenticity of the experience was appreciated by critics, with the main criticism being a lack of new additions to the cast. Later that year, Club Nintendo members in the USA and Canada would have the opportunity to download *Doc Louis's Punch-Out!!*, a limited edition version of the game which allowed players to spar with Little Mac's trainer for the first time.

While *Punch-Out!!* hasn't seen a new release since then, the series hasn't been forgotten – Little Mac's appearance in new *Super Smash Bros* games is sufficient proof of that. It doesn't hurt that every release has been good, with all of them having been developed by teams that recognise the qualities that drew people to the original game. With an array of beloved characters to draw upon and game mechanics that still pack a punch decades down the line, we'd be in the front row if ever Nintendo decides that *Punch-Out!!* needs a comeback bout. ✱

SMASHING CAMEOS

The other appearances of Nintendo's classic boxer and why he's perfect for the Super Smash Bros series

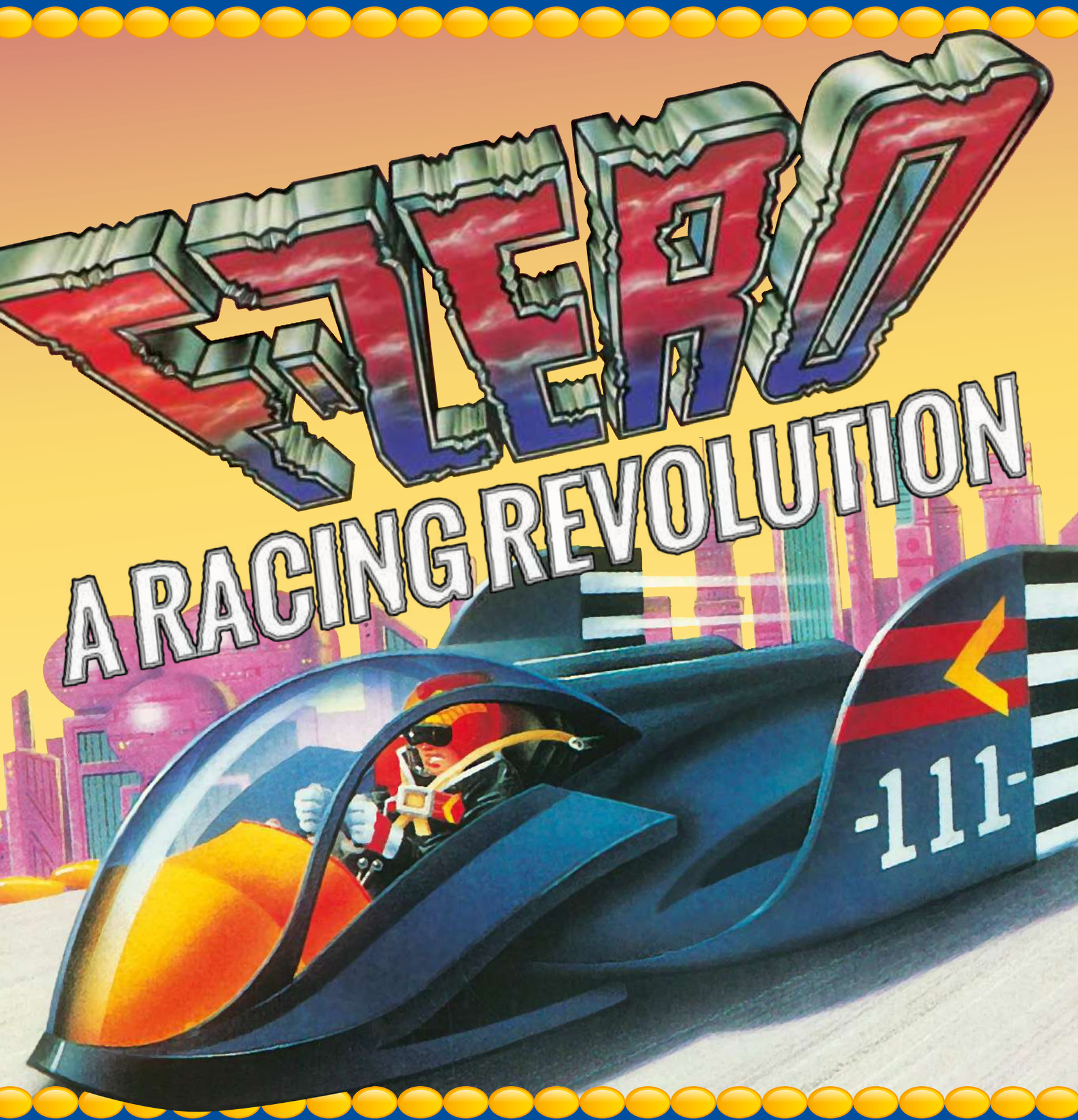
Little Mac hasn't traditionally been one of Nintendo's biggest stars, but over the last decade he's been more active in his pursuit of wider gaming stardom. While *Punch-Out!!* has frequently appeared in mini-game compilations such as the *Wario Ware* and *NES Remix* series, Little Mac himself is best known for three specific cameo appearances.

The first of these was in EA's *Fight Night Round 2*, where he appeared as a GameCube-exclusive hidden character squaring up against the likes of Muhammad Ali and Evander Holyfield. He's in SNES *Super Punch-Out!!* form here as it was his last videogame appearance, and accompanies the game itself as a bonus feature. It's a nice bit of bonus content, but Little Mac does jar with his realistic opponents somewhat. A few years later, he was back in his NES form in the Japan-only Wii game *Captain Rainbow*. In that game the titular protagonist, a long-forgotten TV superhero, needed to help a group of forgotten Nintendo stars achieve their dreams. Having become rather pudgy to say the least, Little Mac needed to lose weight to get back to boxing.

One of the most recent Little Mac cameos was in the excellent *Super Smash Bros* for Wii U and 3DS. Fans of the series will know that *Super Smash Bros* doesn't go light on the nostalgic inclusions, and Little Mac benefits greatly from this. As well as his regular ring gear, he has a green wire-frame form that recalls the original *Punch-Out!!* arcade games. Better yet, fans of the Wii game will be pleased to know that Giga Mac has also made it into the game, with the transformation taking place as part of Little Mac's Final Smash attack.

We're not sure how it's taken so long to include Little Mac, as his status as a boxer makes him one of the most obvious choices for Nintendo's popular multiplayer party fighter, but we're glad that he's finally in. We're also glad that Nintendo has included him in its latest game, *Super Smash Bros Ultimate*, which is out this December and features every single character to ever appear in the series. We've no idea what new special moves Little Mac may have access to, but we're confident that he's going to continue to fit right in.

Special thanks to Jeff "Ippon" Lawson at Ippon Gym, Bournemouth for his help with the photography in this feature
www.ipponfitness.com


F-ZERO
A RACING REVOLUTION
-111-

A COMIC STRIP IS FOUND IN THE INSTRUCTIONS AND ON THE BACK OF THE BOX, ADDING SOME FUN FLAVOUR.

IT'S NOT THE FIRST FUTURISTIC RACER (POWERDROME AND S.T.U.N. RUNNER ARRIVED FIRST) BUT F-ZERO PROVED MORE INFLUENTIAL.

THE MANUAL CALLS THIS A "MAGNETIC FIELD BLOCK COAT" BUT IT LOOKS LIKE ICE, AND SHOULD BE TREATED AS SUCH.

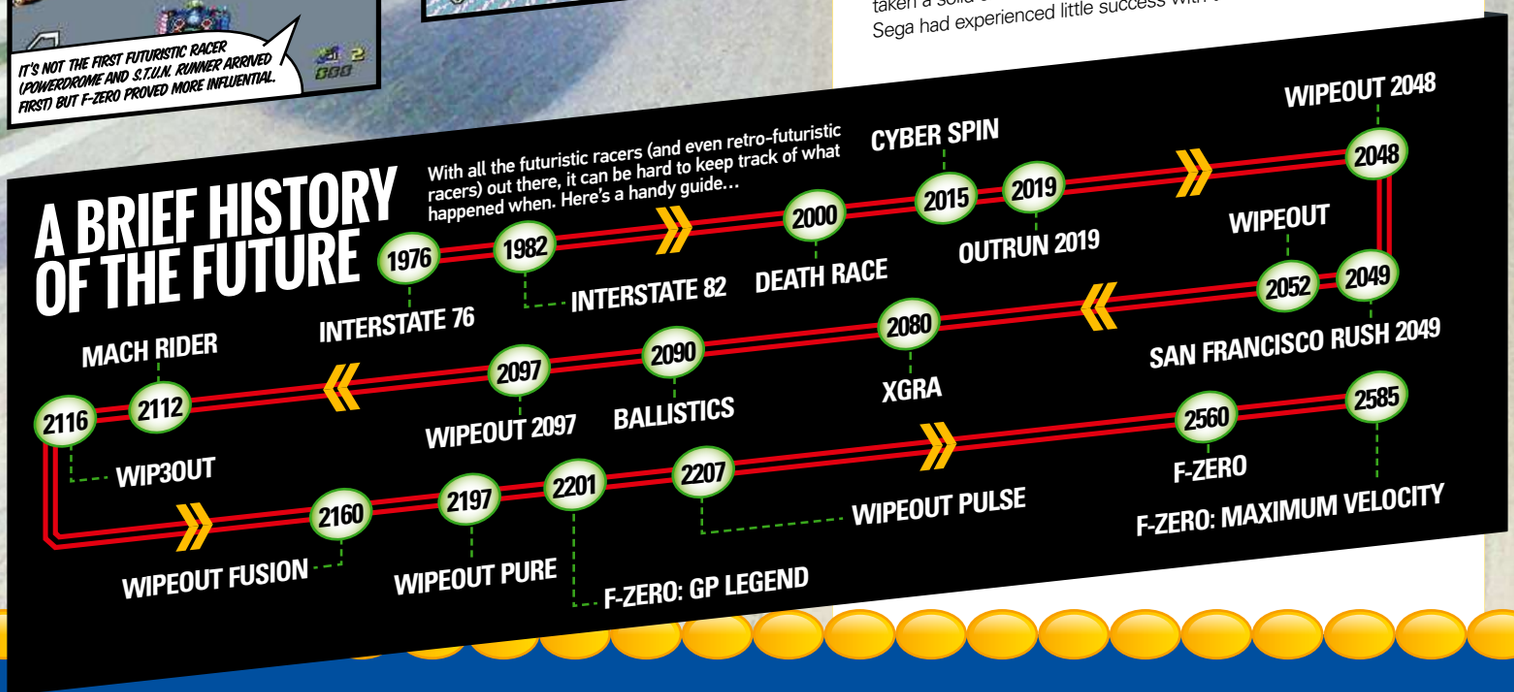
MANY GAMES HAVE A FUTURISTIC THEME, BUT FEW CAN CLAIM TO HAVE SHAPED THE FUTURE QUITE LIKE NINTENDO'S SPEEDY SPECTACULAR. NICK THORPE EXAMINES THE IMPACT OF THIS MODE 7 CLASSIC...

Of all the games released for any given platform, the launch games are perhaps the most important. The ideal launch game makes a positive impact immediately by highlighting the strengths of its host platform, as well as providing a high quality title for players to get stuck into during the lean early months. *F-Zero* was the ideal launch game when it arrived with the Super Famicom in 1990, wowing critics worldwide.

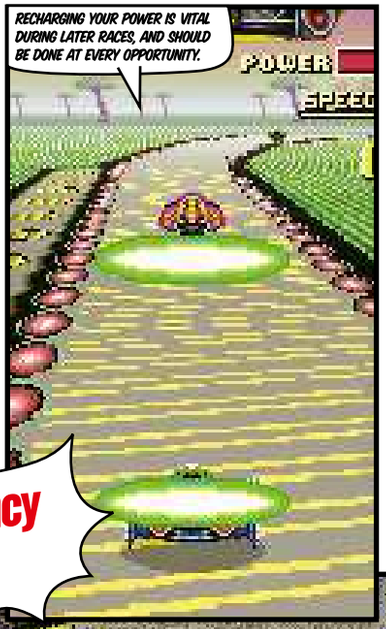
To understand the impact that *F-Zero* had, you need to consider Nintendo's history of conservative business practices – and in specific, its reluctance to replace the NES. While many were questioning how the company could follow up its 8-bit machine, Nintendo didn't see the need to do so – after all, the NES was still selling very well in North America. However, by 1990 the 'pretenders' to Nintendo's throne were starting to form some solid claims with 16-bit consoles. In Japan, NEC's PC Engine had overtaken the Famicom and taken a solid chunk of the market for itself and while Sega had experienced little success with the Mega ▶

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FUTURE

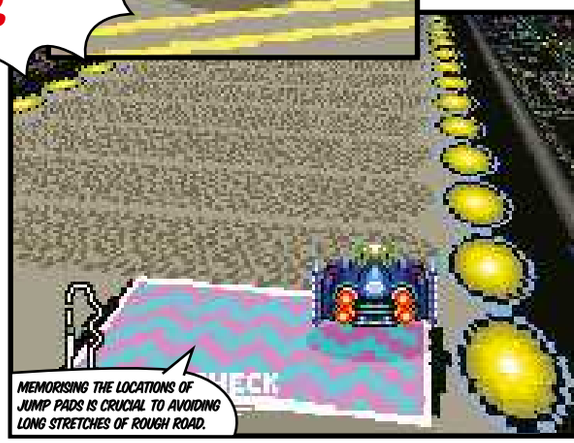
With all the futuristic racers (and even retro-futuristic racers) out there, it can be hard to keep track of what happened when. Here's a handy guide...



NARROW ROADS FENCED IN BY ROUGH PATCHES ARE STANDARD FOR THE COURSE ON SAND OCEAN.



RECHARGING YOUR POWER IS VITAL DURING LATER RACES, AND SHOULD BE DONE AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY.



MEMORISING THE LOCATIONS OF JUMP PADS IS CRUCIAL TO AVOIDING LONG STRETCHES OF ROUGH ROAD.

> "The mix of speed, vibrancy and audio was amazing"
>
> Steve Lycett

▶ Drive in Japan, its American branch was targeting Nintendo in its advertising. Times had changed and Nintendo had to deliver a new machine.

While it had lost ground to competitors by acting slowly, Nintendo's decision to join the new generation late carried some advantages – primarily the ability to create a more advanced machine. The SNES outperformed its competitors in a variety of ways. It could display more colours on screen and had better sound capabilities, but the most exciting improvement that the SNES offered was the famous Mode 7, a graphics mode which gave developers the ability to freely rotate and scale a layer of background. This allowed for the creation of a pseudo-3D playfield which gave the illusion of stretching off into the horizon.

Of course Nintendo needed a game to showcase this unique capability, and Nintendo EAD was set to work on one with Shigeru Miyamoto in place as producer. The game that the team came up with was relatively simple – a racing game named *F-Zero*. Mode 7 was ideally suited to the task of creating roads. In the past, the drawing of roads was often handled by using limited deformation of road graphics to create curves and alter perspective, as seen in games like *Pole Position*. A recently developed alternative approach was to create a fully 3D polygonal road, as in arcade games such as *Hard Drivin'* and computer games like *Stunt Car Racer*. Mode 7, however, allowed for course features such as hairpin turns that were extremely hard to represent using traditional methods, and it could move courses around at an incredible rate with full 3D rendering at that time.

Nintendo had placed a lot of faith in *F-Zero* – as one of just two launch games in Japan, reaction to *F-Zero* would form a substantial part of players' first impressions of the machine. That faith was rewarded, as the game made a rare impact on press and public alike thanks to its technical innovation, and many vividly remember their initial encounter with the game. "I'd seen it in *C&VG* in blurry screenshots, but I saw it in the flesh at an import game shop running on a Super Famicom," recalls Sumo Digital's Steve Lycett. "It looked like something from the future! The best vehicle is pink with flames down the side, that's a pretty bold statement. The fact it whizzed past smoothly with Vegas-esque landscapes animating away just made it visually compelling. That was the same day I decided I needed both the game and the system! The mix of speed, vibrancy and audio was amazing."

Alex Ward of Three Fields Entertainment, best known for his work on the *Burnout* and *Need For Speed* series at Criterion Games, was similarly impressed. "Back in

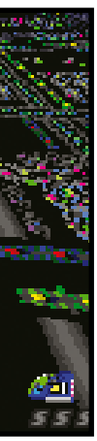
DID YOU KNOW?

■ The original *F-Zero* had an eight page comic within its manual, explaining the back story of Captain Falcon and his rivals.

POWER
SPEED 265 km/h
1'54"01
RIGHT-ANGLED TURNS ARE THE NORM ON SILENCE, MAKING FOR ONE OF THE TRICKIER RACES OF THE KNIGHT CUP.

the early Eighties, I played an amazing arcade game called *Star Rider* by Williams. It blew my mind, so much so that I'm still thinking about it 30 years later. Fast forward a decade. I'm reading about the Japanese version of *F-Zero*. Julian Rignall was one of the first people to play it and write about it. The SNES was Nintendo's wonder machine. Apparently it was the fastest racing game made yet."

The Mode 7 visuals that *F-Zero* employed had successfully turned heads, just as Nintendo hoped. All that was left was for the game built on top of them to keep those heads pointing in the right direction.



F-Zero is a racing game set in the year 2560, in which racers from across the universe compete for glory in an anti-gravity Grand Prix set up for the entertainment of decadent billionaires. The futuristic setting is one Nintendo had previously employed in *Mach Rider*, a NES combat racer featuring high speed action and a hero who looks suspiciously like *F-Zero*'s Captain Falcon. While *F-Zero* takes some of these elements from this previous title, the visual style in the newer game is much more fantastic – hovering vehicles racing on roads floating above densely-packed mega-cities, whereas *Mach Rider* had featured relatively conventional wheeled vehicles on traditional roads.

The futuristic setting is more than just a visual style. *F-Zero*'s races include numerous on-course features to provide additional excitement and challenge for players and while adding more variety to the courses beyond their backdrops. Despite the anti-gravity nature of the vehicles, rough roads will slow down your vehicle and icy-looking magnetic field blocking materials will cause a loss of grip. But while drivers might have experienced these hazards before, it was rather less likely that they would have had to struggle against explosive mines or magnetic fields which draw vehicles off course. Collisions with the side of the track, other vehicles and certain hazards will cause the player's vehicle to lose power, and a total loss of power results in the explosive destruction of your vehicle and a lost life.

Underneath the futuristic setting and unusual hazards, *F-Zero* is an incredibly well-constructed racing game. Players are given a high degree of ▶

Q&A: NICK BURCOMBE

The WipEout designer gives his thoughts on the F-Zero series, and explains how he sought to differentiate his own futuristic racers

Why do you think *F-Zero* had such a impact?
I think I'm right in saying it was one of the first Mode 7 games and so that sense of hurtling into the screen at 60Hz was quite a change on consoles. Games like *Rock N' Roll Racing* and *Micro Machines* typically took the isometric or top down view, but *F-Zero* was something different at the time.

How important would you say the music was to the game?
The music in *F-Zero* was one of the reasons I wanted to have a CD quality soundtrack for *WipEout*. Although I look back at *F-Zero* with great fondness, I think my view at the time was that the music just wasn't good enough quality. I know some of the catchy hook lines are great, but for me – the hardware and chip music in general just wasn't good enough and really I wanted to change that.

Did anything from *F-Zero* inspire *WipEout*?
Two things really. Firstly, Speed! The one thing I loved about *F-Zero* was the sheer speed of the game and with *WipEout* we wanted to capture some of that. Secondly the idea of skimming across the surface and not being attached to the floor with wheels. Of course games like *Powerdrome* were also an influence, but I think between *F-Zero*, *Mario Kart* and *Powerdrome* you can see where my inspiration for *WipEout* came from. Adding the dance music and then, of course, someone else bringing in the graphic design from The Designers Republic, you can probably see how it took on a life of its own.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the track design?
The tracks are designed to suit the game, just making enough out of the jumps and shortcuts you could squeeze from it, although I'll confess – I really struggled with the very narrow ones such as Fire Field.

How do you think *F-Zero X* compared to the *WipEout* games?
I never liked the collisions or the handling to be honest – mind you I didn't like the collisions in *WipEout* either which is why they were the first thing to fix in *WipEout 2097*. And although I can see similarities, I think the omission of weapons was a bit of a let-down, but perhaps they wanted to keep it apart in terms of gameplay from the seminal *Mario Kart*. For me *F-Zero* just stopped evolving in terms of gameplay and become too hard to play.

What do you feel the N64 bought to the series?
I really didn't play it enough to comment knowledgeably, but clearly they were able to go for a lower camera position and were able to do more with track geometry because they weren't contrained to the 2D plane of Mode 7 – but the reality is that we were totally wrapped up in *WipEout* and PlayStation at the same time and so I didn't really spend a lot of time with *F-Zero X*.

Why do you feel the series works without weapons?
I actually don't think it was a plus. I suppose that's one of the reasons the racers I've made, *WipEout*, *WipEout 2097*, *Quantum Redshift*, *Jet-X* and *Table Top Racing* have all had weapons in. *F-Zero* for me became more a battle of man versus track and not man versus opponents. The track got narrower and narrower (a mistake I made on the tunnel in the first track in *WipEout*, too), but faster you go, the more space you need, or you'll be faced with only the hardest of hardcore players being able to have finished it.

Why do you think Nintendo has stayed away from the franchise in recent years?
I'd imagine the same reasons Sony also stopped developing *WipEout*. Future racing was niche, too hardcore and although loved by many, it's a genre that's failed to bring new fans in, whereas *Mario Kart* is a much more broadly appealing game and can cater for most of the mechanics in any *F-Zero* – apart from perhaps the insane speed – but as I've mentioned, this is not a good thing for newcomers, the challenge only satisfies the hardcore gamers.

CIRCUIT TRAINING

The Retro Gamer team looks back on their favourite F-Zero courses

DARRAN MUTE CITY

THERE ARE SEVERAL REASONS WHY I PICKED THIS TRACK. IT'S AN EXCELLENT SHOWCASE FOR THE MODE 7 EFFECTS AND IS A EASY TRACK TO GET TO GRIPS WITH. IT ALSO HAS THE BEST MUSIC IN THE GAME AND IT GETS ME PUMPED WHENEVER I HEAR IT. THERE ARE LOTS AND LOTS OF MEMORIES HERE.

NICK SAND OCEAN

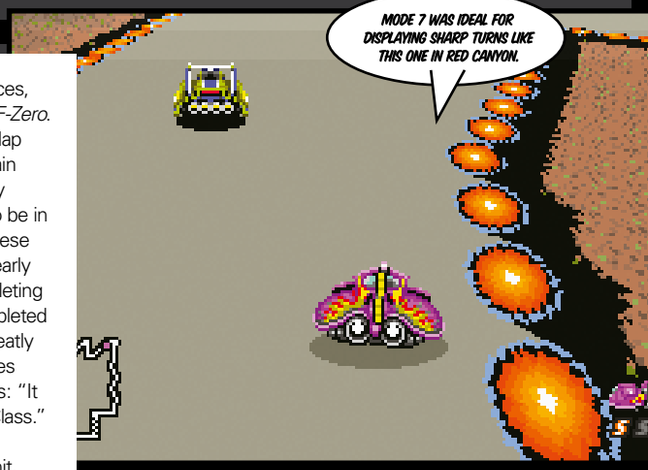
I LOVE TECHNICAL TRACKS AND THIS IS THE FIRST OF THE DEMANDING ONES IN F-ZERO. WITH TWO VERY SHARP TURNS AT THE BEGINNING AND END OF THE RACE, AS WELL AS A HAIRPIN IN THE MIDDLE, SAND OCEAN IS AN IDEAL PLACE TO HONE YOUR HANDLING SKILLS.

JON FIRE FIELD

I WOULD HAVE GONE WITH MUTE CITY ON MUSIC ALONE, BUT I LIKE A CHALLENGE AND FIRE FIELD OFFERS JUST THAT. IT HAS THE BEST VARIETY OUT OF ALL THE TRACKS, A GOOD COMBINATION OF STRAIGHTS, BENDS AND TIGHT CORNERS WHILST AVOIDING THE GRIT AND OBSTACLES.

DREW BIG BLUE

DON'T LISTEN TO DARRAN. PEOPLE LIKE TO CHAMPION MUTE CITY AS THE DE FACTO TRACK OF F-ZERO BUT LET'S BE HONEST, BIG BLUE IS BETTER IN EVERY WAY. EVEN THE SMASH BROS. MELEE. ITERATION OF BIG BLUE TRUMPS MUTE CITY. OH, AND THE MUSIC IS BETTER.



▶ control over their vehicles, thanks to the ability to shift your vehicle's weight with the L and R buttons, which combine with steering to offer greater cornering ability. You'll need to employ this ability frequently, too as the track design quickly becomes very technical, with corners set at right angles, demanding expert driving. Additionally, each of the four vehicles differs markedly in terms of handling, acceleration and top speed, meaning that you'll have to develop different approaches to each track in order to succeed. "It's pure arcade immediacy but with depth you discover as you dig into it," Steve notes. "You start off just being happy winning races, but then you progress to the Fire Stingray ship and then it's all about picking the best lines, dodging hazards with the shoulder buttons and saving up boosts for the last lap."

There's a reason you'll be happy just to win races, as success isn't something that comes easily in *F-Zero*. Races are run under elimination rules, with each lap requiring that the player doesn't fall below a certain position in the race. This starts off at the relatively easy 15th place, but by the final lap you'll need to be in the top three to finish the race. Failing to meet these requirements will see you retiring from the race early and losing a life, impeding your chances of completing the five races that make up a cup, but each completed lap rewards you with a turbo boost which can greatly aid you when used strategically. "The later leagues were very challenging," Alex recalls. Steve agrees: "It was palm sweating and proper hard on Master Class."

Between the expertly crafted gameplay and technical innovations, *F-Zero* was an immediate hit.

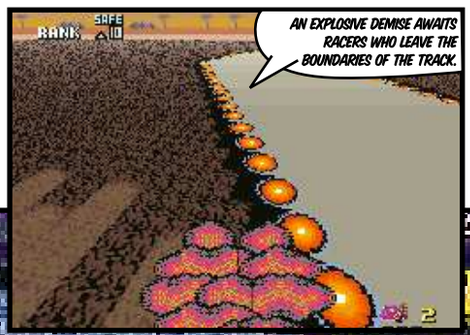
Critics raved about the game, with *Mean Machines*' Richard Leadbetter stating, "there'll never, ever be anything to touch this graphically on the Amiga or Mega Drive," and declaring it "the definitive console racing game." Players were similarly impressed. "I attended an American university in 1990 and one of my friends picked up the ugly purple American SNES with *F-Zero* with it the day it came out," Alex recalls. "We sessioned the game almost non-stop for two or three days straight. Just seeing the visuals takes me back to a very happy time of gaming. The dawn of the SNES was a great, great time for me."

F-Zero's criticism focused on the limited content of the game, with a 1993 retrospective review in *Super Play Gold* stating that *F-Zero* "has precious little in the way of interesting gameplay elements" and "feels rather empty." But while critics cooled on the game, it continued to serve as an excellent introductory game for new SNES players. "My first time with *F-Zero* was with the son of my grandmother's neighbours, during summer vacations in 1993," recalls Valerio Di Donato, whose studio 34BigThings is currently working on the futuristic racer, *Redout*. "This child had many games for his home console, but I was always insisting to play *F-Zero*. I just remember how fun it was – it had speed, amazing controls, drifts, energy recharge, jumps, awesome floating ships… All kinds of stuff you can't find in a normal racing game." This enduring appeal ensured that the game continued to sell strongly. It eventually secured a re-release in 1997, having qualified for Nintendo's Players Choice budget range in North America by selling over a million copies.

While a sequel seemed inevitable after this success, Nintendo didn't revisit *F-Zero* until the SNES had already been superseded by the N64 – and then only with the Satellaview, a Japan-only add-on which enabled players to download data onto rewriteable cartridges via the satellite radio service, St.GIGA. The initial four-week run of *BS F-Zero Grand Prix* began on December 29th 1996 and consisted of *F-Zero*'s 15 tracks plus a brand new Mute City IV race, contested by four new vehicles. During special Soundlink events, players could play within strict time limits alongside special radio shows designed to serve as the audio accompaniment, usually featuring high quality renditions of the in-game music or guitar rock in keeping with the game's own style. *BS F-Zero Grand Prix 2* ran for two weeks from August 10th 1997 and used the same vehicles introduced in its predecessor. Unfortunately, the Soundlink versions of *BS F-Zero Grand Prix 2* seem to have been lost to history, and video recordings serve as the only evidence of its content.

DID YOU KNOW?

■ Mr EAD is named after the Nintendo EAD development team. Appropriately, his craft has stats of E, A and D respectively!



The wait for a true *F-Zero* sequel was a long one, but when *F-Zero X* was released for the N64 in 1998 it proved that the wait was worthwhile. Technological innovations allowed designers to move past the flat tracks of the original game and utilise true 3D track designs for the first time, meaning that players were subjected to loops, corkscrews and jumps, as well as racing through tunnels and on cylindrical courses. Turbo boosts were reworked to consume ship energy, bringing a strong element of risk to races, and a massively increased selection of machines let players to race how they wanted to. The game retains a striking look today, as Nintendo once again traded graphical detail for speed and a high frame-rate. A later expansion kit for the Japan-only 64DD add-on let players to design their own courses, a first for the series.

The Game Boy Advance was the next platform to receive an *F-Zero* game, with development duties falling to Nintendo subsidiary Nd Cube. Set in the year 2585, *F-Zero: Maximum Velocity* featured a new generation of racers piloting all-new machines on exclusive tracks. Despite the theme of renewal the game design was wholly lifted from the SNES original, reverting to progress-based boosts and the elimination race format. Even the visual effect was the same, with the handheld machine going one step further than the SNES by keeping the road and its surrounding scenery on individual layers, heightening the pseudo-3D effect by adding the illusion of depth. The game accompanied the Game Boy Advance at launch in 2001 and received praise from critics, particularly as it included a multiplayer mode.

The *F-Zero X* formula was further developed with *F-Zero GX* and *F-Zero AX*, Gamecube and arcade games respectively. The game was the first joint development between ▶

former bitter rivals Nintendo and Sega, with the latter's Amusement Vision studio taking charge. *GX* included a story mode for the first time, expanding on the universe of the series with cutscenes, and allowed players to create their own custom machines to race with. *AX* provided straightforward races but boasted exclusive tracks and vehicles, which could be unlocked for play in *GX* by inserting your Gamecube memory card into the arcade cabinet. Both games were visually incredible, marrying the series' trademark speed with detailed 3D visuals. *F-Zero GX* was another critical success, but did receive some criticism for its high difficulty level, while *F-Zero AX* was a rather rare sight in arcades.

The final two games in the *F-Zero* series were developed by Suzak for the Game Boy Advance, and took place in an alternate timeline which followed the events of the animated TV series *F-Zero: GP Legend*. This reboot is set in the year 2201 and follows Ryu Suzaku – or Rick Wheeler, to Western audiences – as he is revived 150 years after a near-fatal crash while in pursuit of the criminal, Zoda. As you'd expect, many existing *F-Zero* characters including Captain Falcon and Black Shadow are drawn into the story as the series progresses.

The first of the tie-in games was itself titled *F-Zero: GP Legend* and boasted a story mode based on the TV show. As with *Maximum Velocity*, the game was based largely on the SNES gameplay model, but it did bring boosting into line with the home console games and drop the elimination aspect of races. Upon release in 2003 critics recognised the quality of gameplay, but felt that it was overly familiar after *Maximum Velocity*. The 2004 follow-up *F-Zero Climax* also suffered from offering few new features, but it did boast improved Mode 7-style visuals and revised gameplay which combined the boost systems of previous games. However, the major improvement was the addition of an integrated track editor, something which hadn't been included as standard in the previous GBA games. Unfortunately *F-Zero Climax* was only released in Japan, meaning that many fans of the series never got to play what is arguably the most refined version of the original formula.

> "We sessioned the game almost non-stop for two or three days straight"
> Alex Ward

While there hasn't been a new *F-Zero* game since its brief flurry of sequels ended over a decade ago, the series' place in history is secure as its influence extends far beyond its direct lineage. The original game was a powerful demonstration of Mode 7 and it became a signature feature of the SNES, appearing in acclaimed titles such as *Super Mario World* and *Final Fantasy VI*. For racing games, *F-Zero* became the model to which many other SNES racing games adhered. Games like Seta's *Exhaust Heat* and KAZe's *Uchuu Race: Astro Go! Go!* owe a debt to *F-Zero*, and they're far from the only third-party games to do so.

As for Nintendo itself, it wasn't done with developing the use of Mode 7 or fantasy racing games. Nintendo EAD would go on to develop *Super Mario Kart*, another Mode 7 racer which featured simpler tracks but revolutionised the use of hazards by allowing the players to deploy them as weapons. The driving force behind the development of *Super Mario Kart* was to create a game which offered the multiplayer which *F-Zero* had lacked. The fact that this was achieved is a technical feat, which often goes unrecognised as people concentrate their praise on the incredibly addictive qualities of the multiplayer in *Super Mario Kart*.

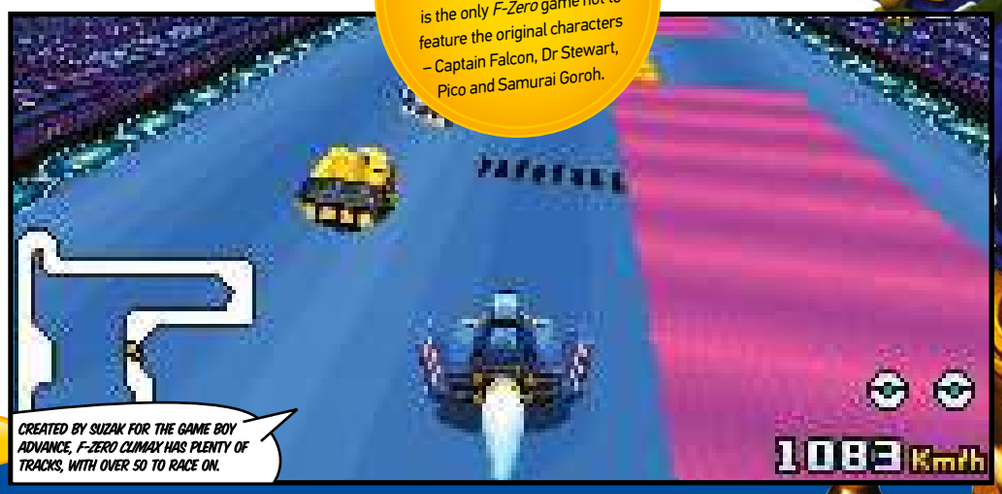
The longest-lasting part of *F-Zero*'s legacy with Nintendo has been its appealing comic book world. While the series hasn't been revisited as frequently as the likes of *Mario* or *Zelda*, *F-Zero* receives recognition from Nintendo in games such as *Super Smash Bros.*, in which themed stages are commonly included and Captain Falcon is a mainstay. Additionally, the game recently received recognition in the *Mario Kart* series, with the Mute City and Big Blue tracks appearing in *Mario Kart 8* as part of the game's downloadable content offering.

However, it wasn't just Nintendo and its developers that were impacted by *F-Zero*. Technologically, Sega recognised the value of Mode 7 and granted the Mega Drive similar capabilities via the Mega-CD add-on. Games like *BC Racers* often employed the Mega-CD's ability to scale sprites as well as backgrounds, providing trackside details such as trees and houses. While these made for more convincing pseudo-3D environments, games on Sega's hardware struggled to achieve the speed displayed by *F-Zero*. Meanwhile, racing games were established as a key way to launch a platform. Steve contends that *F-Zero* "showed how racers are a brilliant way to showcase hardware, something Namco did with *Ridge Racer* on the PlayStation."

Beyond the technological impact of *F-Zero*, there was its legacy in terms of game design. Over the years, *F-Zero* has been name-checked repeatedly as a variety of futuristic racers have drawn varying degrees of inspiration from Nintendo's game, from the *Extreme-G*

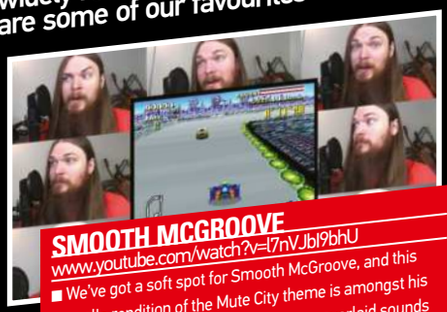
DID YOU KNOW?

■ *F-Zero: Maximum Velocity* is the only *F-Zero* game not to feature the original characters – Captain Falcon, Dr Stewart, Pico and Samurai Goroh.



MUTE CITY MELODIES

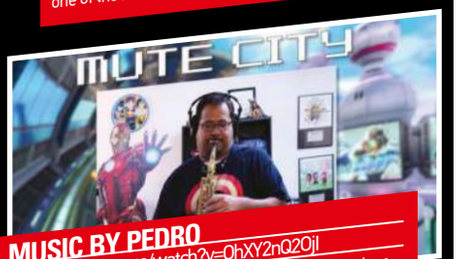
F-Zero's soundtrack has been widely revered and covered – here are some of our favourites



SMOOTH MCGROOVE
www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7nVJbl9bhU
■ We've got a soft spot for Smooth McGroove, and this acapella rendition of the Mute City theme is amongst his best work. The way the vocal tracks are overlaid sounds oddly like the way the SNES plays samples, too.

TOM WINTER
www.youtube.com/watch?v=qeKEsgmYq0I
■ With the electric guitar so prevalent in *F-Zero* soundtracks, the idea of an acoustic rendition of the Mute City theme might seem sacrilegious. It actually works out well, though – we'd urge you to give it a listen.

TOXICXETERNITY & MAXIMUMHAMBURGERS
www.youtube.com/watch?v=9f-lza7vOII
■ This medley is probably the closest to the original game's soundtrack, and covers the SNES soundtrack. It's one of the more elaborate productions out there too.



MUSIC BY PEDRO
www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hXY2nQ20jI
■ Perhaps the most unusual cover on offer here, we love this saxophone rendition of the Mute City theme. Not only is it unique, there's some great freestyle play in the middle of the track which sets it apart from other covers.

series to the likes of *Hi-Octane* and *Cyber Speedway*. Most of these games fell by the wayside quickly, a fact that Valerio attributes to Nintendo's stellar game design. "*F-Zero* works because everything in it works, and every game that tried to follow *F-Zero* and failed because something was missing."

DID YOU KNOW?
■ At just 770kg, Gomar & Shioh's Twin Noritta is the lightest of all the *F-Zero* craft. Black Shadow's Black Bull is the heaviest at 2340kg.

***F-Zero* is one of the defining influences on its own closest competitor, Sony's *WipEout* series. "Whilst there had been futuristic racers before, *F-Zero* opened the door to** many more. Without it there wouldn't be a *WipEout*," asserts Steve. Psygnosis nailed a distinctive formula early on by fusing *F-Zero*'s speed and setting with the weaponry of *Mario Kart*, before adding its own style and 3D visuals. Later games in both series have been known to pinch each other's tricks, from the adoption of attacking moves in *F-Zero X* to *WipEout 2097*'s addition of vehicle destruction and pit lanes.

"Futuristic racers have never struck the goldmine," states Alex, "but then, maybe technology was always holding them back." He's got a point. *F-Zero* has now been absent from our consoles for over a decade, and all of its competitors are dormant. But even with that point made, there's an allure to futuristic racing games that he finds hard to resist. "I remember giving serious thought to having a crack at one after watching *Tron: Legacy* on a transatlantic flight – then scrawling a basic outline out on a napkin," Alex confesses.

That allure holds for Valerio and his team on *Redout*, too. "*F-Zero* was the first to introduce key aspects in terms of visuals and gameplay and it's exactly what we are trying to achieve," he explains. "We pushed the visual contrast to the extreme, blending low poly models with the amazing shaders and visual effects that *Unreal Engine 4* allowed us to create. The driving model is completely physics-based, trying to innovate in a field that has been static since *F-Zero*." For Steve, the series has been a source of inspiration for his own racers. "We also took a leaf out of *F-Zero X* and *GX* with the insane 3D track design they have so we'd get our own rollercoaster ride feel."

It's notable that with the sublime *Super Mario World*, Nintendo could have sold the game on the basis of Mode 7 alone. "There are a lot of games nowadays that I like to call 'engine showoff', games where technology is mostly there to sell the licence of the game engine to other companies," Valerio says. "*F-Zero* could have been the same, if they didn't put this much effort into really making a great game. And that's my definition of masterpiece: a perfect union of innovation and design." Masterpiece is an adequate description for a game which, even after 28 years, defines its subgenre and continues to fascinate developers and players alike. "I'd love to work on the *F-Zero* franchise," Steve says. We can see why. As an iconic SNES game, an iconic racing game and an iconic Nintendo world, *F-Zero* boasts a proud heritage. The chance to add to it would be irresistible. ✱

MEAN MACHINES

The original roster of four vehicles has expanded over the years – just check out this starting grid...

BLUE FALCON
CAPTAIN FALCON
BODY: B ■ BOOST: C ■ GRIP: B
ORIGIN: F-ZERO

GREEN PANTHER
ANTONIO GUSTER
- BODY: A
- BOOST: B
- GRIP: D

ORIGIN: F-ZERO X

QUEEN METEOR
MRS ARROW
- BODY: E
- BOOST: B
- GRIP: B

ORIGIN: F-ZERO X

IRON TIGER
BABA
- BODY: B
- BOOST: D
- GRIP: A

ORIGIN: F-ZERO X

HYPER SPEEDER
BEASTMAN
- BODY: C
- BOOST: C
- GRIP: A

ORIGIN: F-ZERO X

MAD WOLF
BILLY
- BODY: B
- BOOST: B
- GRIP: C

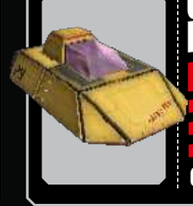
ORIGIN: F-ZERO X

BIG FANG
BIO REX
- BODY: B
- BOOST: D
- GRIP: A

ORIGIN: F-ZERO X

BLACK BULL
BLACK SHADOW
- BODY: A
- BOOST: E
- GRIP: A

ORIGIN: F-ZERO X



CRAZY BEAR
DR CLASH
- BODY: A
- BOOST: B
- GRIP: E

ORIGIN: F-ZERO X

GOLDEN FOX
DR STEWART
BODY: D ■ BOOST: A ■ GRIP: D
ORIGIN: F-ZERO

MIGHTY TYPHOON
DRAQ
- BODY: C
- BOOST: A
- GRIP: D

ORIGIN: F-ZERO X

GREAT STAR
MR EAD
- BODY: E
- BOOST: A
- GRIP: D

ORIGIN: F-ZERO X

BLOOD HAWK
BLOOD FALCON
- BODY: B
- BOOST: A
- GRIP: E

ORIGIN: F-ZERO X

TWIN NORITTA
GOMAR & SHIOH
- BODY: E
- BOOST: A
- GRIP: C

ORIGIN: F-ZERO X

ASTRO ROBIN
JACK LEVIN
- BODY: B
- BOOST: D
- GRIP: A

ORIGIN: F-ZERO X

LITTLE WYVERN
JAMES MCCLOUD
- BODY: E
- BOOST: B
- GRIP: B

ORIGIN: F-ZERO X

PINK SPIDER
DAI SAN GEN
- BODY: C
- BOOST: C
- GRIP: A

ORIGIN: F-ZERO AX

WONDER WASP
JOHN TANAKA
- BODY: D
- BOOST: A
- GRIP: D

ORIGIN: F-ZERO X

RAINBOW PHOENIX
PHOENIX
- BODY: B
- BOOST: B
- GRIP: C

ORIGIN: F-ZERO AX

SILVER RAT
DAIGOROH
- BODY: D
- BOOST: A
- GRIP: D

ORIGIN: F-ZERO AX

MIGHTY HURRICANE
ROGER BUSTER
- BODY: E
- BOOST: B
- GRIP: B

ORIGIN: F-ZERO X

NIGHT THUNDER
SILVER NEELSEN
- BODY: B
- BOOST: A
- GRIP: E

ORIGIN: F-ZERO X

KING METEOR
SUPER ARROW
- BODY: E
- BOOST: B
- GRIP: B

ORIGIN: F-ZERO X

WHITE CAT
JODY SUMMER
- BODY: C
- BOOST: C
- GRIP: A

ORIGIN: F-ZERO X

GROOVY TAXI
PJ
- BODY: B
- BOOST: D
- GRIP: B

ORIGIN: F-ZERO AX

SUPER PIRANHA
KATE ALEN
- BODY: B
- BOOST: C
- GRIP: B

ORIGIN: F-ZERO X

RED GAZELLE
MIGHTY GAZELLE
- BODY: E
- BOOST: A
- GRIP: C

ORIGIN: F-ZERO X

DARK SCHNEIDER
DEATHBORN
- BODY: A
- BOOST: B
- GRIP: D

ORIGIN: F-ZERO GX

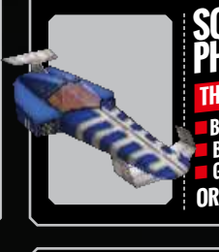
WILD GOOSE
PICO

BODY: A ■ **BOOST:** B ■ **GRIP:** C

ORIGIN: F-ZERO

DID YOU KNOW?

■ *F-Zero*'s manual claims that Mute City was originally called Mutant City, but in the *GP Legend* story it is said to be the former New York.



SONIC PHANTOM
THE SKULL
- BODY: C
- BOOST: A
- GRIP: D

ORIGIN: F-ZERO X

FAT SHARK
DON GENIE
- BODY: A
- BOOST: B
- GRIP: E

ORIGIN: F-ZERO AX

SPACE ANGLER
LEON
- BODY: C
- BOOST: C
- GRIP: A

ORIGIN: F-ZERO X

BUNNY FLASH
LILY
- BODY: D
- BOOST: B
- GRIP: A

ORIGIN: F-ZERO AX

SPARK MOON
PRINCIA
- BODY: B
- BOOST: C
- GRIP: B

ORIGIN: F-ZERO AX

DEEP CLAW
OCTOMAN
- BODY: B
- BOOST: B
- GRIP: C

ORIGIN: F-ZERO X

ROLLING TURTLE
QQQ
- BODY: A
- BOOST: D
- GRIP: B

ORIGIN: F-ZERO AX

WILD BOAR
MICHAEL CHAIN
- BODY: A
- BOOST: C
- GRIP: C

ORIGIN: F-ZERO X

MAGIC SEAGULL
SPADE
- BODY: B
- BOOST: A
- GRIP: E

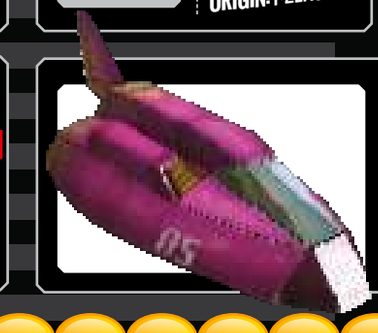
ORIGIN: F-ZERO AX

COSMIC DOLPHIN
DIGI-BOY
- BODY: E
- BOOST: A
- GRIP: C

ORIGIN: F-ZERO AX

DEATH ANCHOR
ZODA
- BODY: E
- BOOST: A
- GRIP: C

ORIGIN: F-ZERO X



FIRE STINGRAY
SAMURAI GOROH

BODY: A ■ **BOOST:** D ■ **GRIP:** B

ORIGIN: F-ZERO

Special thanks to Dan Stephenson for lending us his mint copy of F-Zero and Mark Hogg and Trevor Briscoe for their additional help

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come

INFO

- **Featured System:** GameCube
- **Year Released:** 2001
- **Publisher:** Nintendo
- **Developer:** Nintendo EAD
- **Key People:** Hideki Konno (director), Shigeru Miyamoto (producer), Takashi Tezuka (producer)
- **Buy it for:** £10+

GO DEEPER

- ***Luigi's Mansion*** **sold over 2.5 million units in the US.**
- **As with many of Kazumi Totaka's soundtracks, *Luigi's Mansion* contains *Totaka's Song*.**

LUIGI'S MANSION

Darran Jones professes his love for Luigi's only GameCube outing and explains why it's one of the system's most underrated games. Be sure to add it to your own personal collection

THE BACKGROUND

The most interesting aspect of *Luigi's Mansion* only came to light a few short months ago when a roundtable interview was hosted by IGN at the 2010 E3. Hideki Konno, Nintendo's development head of Nintendo EAD Software Development Group 1, who is currently spearheading the 3DS project, revealed the following information:

"When I was directing *Luigi's Mansion*, we experimented with placing a 3D panel on the screen and making it play in 3D. However, at that time we had screen resolution issues and cost issues. And to separately sell a panel for 3D gameplay wasn't a practical idea as a mass-market product."

In a way, it's typical of Nintendo being ahead of its time, but one of the biggest and most completely unjustified complaints of *Luigi's Mansion* – that it's far too short – is now de rigueur in the industry.

Originally unveiled at Nintendo Space World 2000, *Luigi's Mansion* started off as a tech demo in order to show off the GameCube's impressive lighting and particle effects, but by Nintendo's next event it was revealed as a brand new adventure. To no doubt help establish it as a brand new title, Luigi, rather than Mario, became the star of the game, making the system the first home console in Nintendo's history to not actually feature a *Mario* game in its launch line-up.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of *Luigi's Mansion*, though, is that even though it received almost universal praise in every review we've ever read about it – so-called longevity issues aside – the scores never tallied up. It's almost as if reviewers couldn't accept that Luigi and not his brother was launching a new console. Despite the barely above average scores, *Luigi's Mansion* still went on to become the GameCube's bestselling launch game, an accolade that it thoroughly deserves.

THE GAME

When King Boo and his 50 loyal servants capture Mario, the cowardly Luigi must step up to the plate

Things of note

Game Boy Horror

Shaped like the Game Boy Color, this handy little device works like a PDA and allows you to check your map, list your items and see if any Boos are skulking nearby. You can then use a camera to search for them.

Mario? Marrriiooo!

Luigi's Mansion oozes charm. While pressing the A button is normally used to search for hidden money and ghosts, it also results in Luigi giving out a plaintive call to his missing brother. It never fails to raise a smile.

Ghouls 'N Ghosts

In addition to the Boos and portrait ghosts that Luigi has to defeat, there are also an additional eight general ghosts, each with their own traits, who constantly harass you as you explore the large mansion.

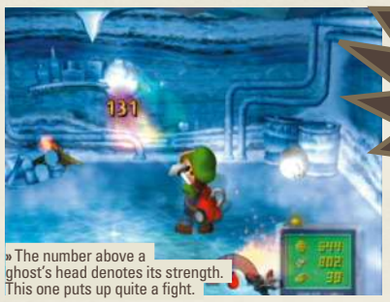
Bowser trouble

Okay, so it's not technically a *Mario* game, but that hasn't stopped Bowser from making an appearance. All right, it's not really Bowser – it's King Boo in a metal suit – but it still serves as a fitting ending to the game.

Now in 3D!

Considering it was first conceived as a 3D game it should come as no surprise to learn that *Luigi's Mansion* is now available to buy on Nintendo's 3DS. It's a great port, too with a range of decent extras to enjoy.

» *Luigi's Mansion* is filled with humour that adds massively to the game's appeal.



» The number above a ghost's head denotes its strength. This one puts up quite a fight.

What the press thought

Cube
Score: 7.6/10
"Lingers on the brink of being incredible… before taking a rather large step back and looking a little forlorn."

NTSC-uk.com
Score: 7/10
"A modest example of what the GC is capable of and a polished title, like we expect from Nintendo."

and rescue his more heroic brother. Armed with his trusty Poltergust 3000 and a Game Boy Horror, and guided by the scatty Professor E Gadd, Luigi must slowly explore the huge mansion and not only rescue Mario, but also suck up King Boo's cohorts and another group of ghouls that have escaped from the picture prisons in which Gadd had previously imprisoned them.

At its heart, *Luigi's Mansion* is nothing more than a straightforward boss rush, albeit one cleverly hidden within the framework of an imposing haunted mansion. Each room that Luigi enters cleverly mixes puzzle and action elements – certain ghosts can only be captured when their guards are down – to create a highly innovative and entertaining experience, which is as refreshing today as it was a decade ago.

Utilising gameplay mechanics that the official *Ghostbusters* game failed to improve on eight years later, Luigi's battles mainly revolve around sucking up ghosts by utilising both the directional stick and C-stick. It's a beautifully simplistic mechanic that also elicits great humour, due to the poor plumber often being dragged around helplessly by larger opponents as he struggles to gain the upper hand. Clear out all the ghosts in a particular room and you can progress to the next one, ever aware that somewhere in the gigantic mansion is your lost brother. Eventually items can be picked up that will imbue your Poltergust 3000 with the power to expel certain elements, but the core concept of hoovering up ghosts rarely ever changes.

Even with such repetitive gameplay at its core, *Luigi's Mansion* never ever appears… well, repetitive. Each room that Luigi unlocks effectively acts as its own mini-stage, with ghosts – especially the many portrait ghosts that Luigi must recapture – all requiring new techniques and tactics to beat them. Whether it's heating up a ghoul's meal so that he'll eat it, or creating a draft to distract a vain spook, you're always impressed by the sheer inventiveness and humour to the situations that the game keeps throwing at you.

Add in masses of charm, humour and character – fake doors crush Luigi flat, while the clearly spooked out plumber nervously hums along to the game's soundtrack and calls out to his brother – and *Luigi's Mansion* proves that even the most cowardly of heroes can have his day.

Why it's a future classic

Everything about *Luigi's Mansion* is a joy to experience. The pacing, despite its shortness, is superb; it's filled with a variety of clever mechanics; and it features a range of clever and inventive boss encounters. Yes, it's amazingly streamlined and essentially a simple boss rush, but it's one that you'll constantly find yourself returning to, simply because it's just so damned entertaining to play.

The game's perceived lack of longevity also works in its favour, as the mansion is such a joy to explore that you'll constantly want to replay it, if only so you can finally nab all of King Boo's hard-to-find servants and replay your favourite encounters. Criminally overlooked, certainly by critics, on release, *Luigi's Mansion* truly is a slice of gaming brilliance that people are slowly but ever so surely beginning to warm to. What took you all so long?

THE MAKING OF THE LEGEND OF ZELDA® the Wind Waker™

Some still write it off as the franchise being all at sea, but look deeper and you'll find a Zelda game far closer to the original than any that have come since. Luke Albigés sets sail in search of the surprising truth…

READERS REMEMBER

"I think its amazing that after all the crying over *that* E3 and the mocks of '*Celda*' it's become a game that everyone adores more than recent *Zelda*s. Its got so many great little touches that add to the world but are so subtle you'll miss them, stuff like Link's feet interacting with different floor heights, the way the lighting works and Link's features. Say what you will about the end of the game and missing dungeons, but that will not take away from it being magical"

SACK MAN 64

» Sailing is relaxing, at least until the sun goes down…

So you most likely already have your favourite *Zelda* game locked down. Everyone does, it seems. Many cite the exceptional 3D rebirth of the franchise that is *Ocarina Of Time*, 16-bit purists wouldn't dare name anything other than *A Link To The Past* while a few stragglers would point to Game Boy debut *Link's Awakening*, to which we'd offer the universal sign for 'good choice'. Which is an assured nod, in case you were wondering. A far less popular choice, however, would be the one and only GameCube outing, *The Wind Waker* – liberties were taken with structure, mechanics and style that meant that this particular game sticks out like a toon-shaded sore thumb alongside the rest of the series. But does that make it a bad choice? Does it hell. If anything, there's more of the NES original in *The Wind Waker* than there is in any *Zelda* game previously or since, although it might not be immediately apparent through the cartoon visuals and the watery setting.

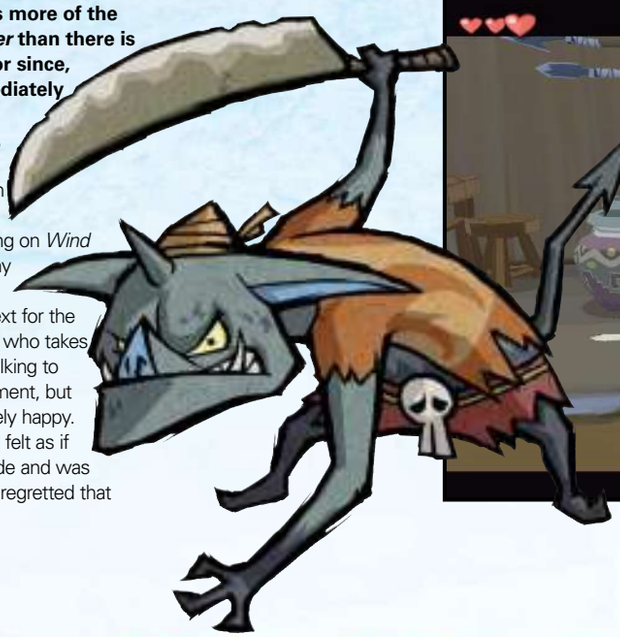
Speaking with Eiji Aonuma, we learn that Link's primary companion on the vast open seas was written from experience. "We were working on *Wind Waker* right around the time that my son was born," he recalls. "Having just become a father, I wrote the text for the King Of Red Lions, the talking boat who takes Link on his adventure, as if I was talking to my own son." It's a beautiful sentiment, but one with which Aonuma isn't entirely happy. "Looking back over that text now, I felt as if he had a really self-important attitude and was forcing Link to go along with him. I regretted that a bit and changed the way he speaks to be a bit more mild in the remake."

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO EAD
- **RELEASED:** 2002
- **PLATFORM:** GAMECUBE
- **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

But rewind to before that and you'll see a developer in what *killer7*'s gimp might retroactively describe as 'a tight spot'. After blowing minds and dropping jaws with *Ocarina Of Time* and ambitious follow-up *Majora's Mask*, Nintendo found itself in a tricky situation. A new console meant all the old faces had to come back out to play – Mario had to bolt on a superfluous jetpack while we'd see the world through Samus' eyes for the first time, but what of Link? "Right when *Majora's Mask* ended, we already knew that GameCube was going to be our next platform, so

» Training with Orca gets Link his first sword. Lovely.



READERS REMEMBER

"Absolutely magnificent game. I'm a huge *Zelda* fan but for some reason *WW* took me about three attempts to get into, but when I did finally get into it I loved it and couldn't put it down. The graphics/style are great and still look fab today whilst the gameplay is fun. I even enjoyed the sailing as I found it quite relaxing floating around the open seas. I also enjoyed plugging in the GBA and finding the Tingle statues which added extra elements. Overall I think it's a fantastic game and easily in my top five *Zelda* games"

DSTE

» Not that we needed to be told how swords work…

» Shame nobody keeps their cash in their lawn in real life.

» Might want to avoid that big, glowy orange patch.

"I wrote the text for the King Of Red Lions as if I was talking to my own son"

Eiji Aonuma

we had to begin planning for that," explained Shigeru Miyamoto in a Nintendo interview about the game in 2004. "The reason we were able to show you the more realistic-looking *Zelda* battle at Space World 2000 was because we had been doing some preliminary experiments with the console prior to completing *Majora's Mask*. That's why that video existed. It wasn't until afterward that we began working with the director and the programmers to go ahead and create *The Wind Waker*."

But there was quite a difference between the Space World demo and the game that was actually in development. "That announcement was shocking to *Zelda* fans," recalls Nintendo's Satoru Iwata. "Many were surprised and puzzled." Indeed they were – the Space World tech demo (for that's all it turned out to be) showed off a mature Link, while the game itself would take a decidedly different tack. "When I first saw the toon-shaded *Zelda*, I was very surprised and excited by it," admitted Miyamoto. "However, I was startled by the response we got from the press when we showed it off the first time. They all said, 'Oh, so is Nintendo now taking *Zelda* and trying to aim it only at kids?' Really, the whole concept we had behind it was that we thought it was a very creative and new way to show off Link. All of a sudden it had been interpreted as Nintendo's new strategy, and that was a shock for us."

And just like that, a change in art style divided a fan base almost overnight. "When something unexpected happens, the first reaction people have is to be wary." Aonuma tells us. "We expected a negative reaction at the show. Although I don't regret anything, part of the reaction was that this version of *Zelda* looked 'kiddy' and we weren't able to shake that off with any of the PR we did later. We encountered an awful lot of problems from the drastic leap we took with *Wind Waker*."

Miyamoto also wanted it to be known that this was not just change for change's sake. "When it comes to Nintendo strategy, it's not that we want to make games for kids," he explained. "It's that we want to make them creative while appealing to a wider audience. Obviously we see games as entertainment, ▶

READERS REMEMBER

"One of my favourite memories from this game was sailing and then looking back behind me to see how far away I came from, with the starting island now further back but somewhat visible. Yeah, it probably got old for some people later in the game, but back then that blew my mind"

ALK

▶ and we want to find the best way to make the gameplay experience entertaining for everyone." But it was too late. Already, many of the *Zelda* hardcore had jumped ship based on the cartoon-style visuals of the new game, while yet more of the unconverted chased the impossible dream of photorealism on PS2 and Xbox. Hindsight is Link's best friend in this respect. Which ages better – the flat-colour shading of *Wind Waker* or the London-aping nonsense of *The Getaway*? *Wind Waker*'s look is timeless, as evidenced by the recent HD version on Wii U – a spot of tidying up and it's instantly the best-looking game on a self-professed next-gen console, whereas any PS2 game from the same era would take tens of thousands of man hours to scrub up to the same level.

And in that respect, we have our first analog with the series' origins. No matter how many photo-realistic games are released from now until the rest of forever,

> **"PART OF THE REACTION WAS THAT THIS ZELDA LOOKED 'KIDDY'"**
> Eiji Aonuma

A Link To The Past will *still* look good. And with Link's colourful and relatively basic look in *The Wind Waker,* we see exactly the same thing. It's a timeless art style, not one hung up on chasing the latest tech or trends and as such, it's one that still looks amazing today. But by Miyamoto's own admission, it's not the style that saw *Wind Waker* get the green light so much as the inherent practicality.

"It's not so much that we wanted to go with the toon shading as it is that we are really happy with the proportions of Link in the game," he recalls. "We liked the fact that we can have the package art match the artwork in the game. In the past you'd have a Game Boy *Zelda* game and a home console *Zelda* game where the art styles didn't match. On top of that, the art style on the boxes didn't match the art style in the

Next
I can see what you're doing through this stone, and obviously you can hear me through it. So...if you see ,
you'd better press that button!
007

» "HEY! LISTEN!" No. We can work this out for ourselves, thanks.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

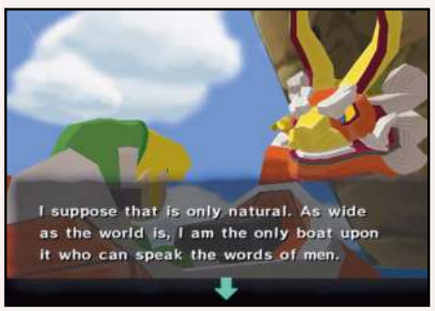
There are many highlights in Link's maiden maritime adventure. Here are just a few of the absolute finest...

THE STORY SO FAR

■ Not only is *The Wind Waker* one of the few games in the series to acknowledge Link's previous adventures, it also manages to do so in a striking way. The game begins with the entire history of Hyrule told through woodcarving pictures and subtitled folklore (for those who don't speak Hylian), this adventure's mythology forged by Link's exploits in older games. Genius.

TIME TO SAY GOODBYE

■ You can't stay on Outset Island forever, you know. After Aryll's kidnapping and Link's rather brief training in swordsmanship, it's time to leave your home and set out in search of adventure and your missing sister. Townsfolk gather on the beach, but it's the final shots of Link's gran watching from afar that really give you a kick in the tear ducts.

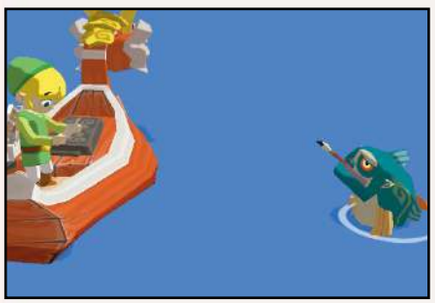


THE BOAT CAN TALK?!

■ Both the setting and the game's cover sort of gave away the fact that Link would take charge of his own boat, but we weren't expecting it to be alive. That's just weird. The King Of Red Lions proves to be a good friend to our hero, although we can't say we appreciated him stopping us from exploring the world early on...

MY FIRST SUNKEN TREASURE

■ Sailing around with glowing plumes erupting from under waves is frustrating early on but, once you get the grappling hook, all that booty can be yours. There's enormous satisfaction to be gleaned from using clues and logic to find a treasure map's big score, but even the regular treasures are a nice little touch.



FLASHBACK

■ With three orbs under your belt, you're able to unearth the game's first big secret – the Tower Of The Gods. Survive its trials and you're ready to take a trip through time, venturing into the submerged Hyrule Castle to get a glimpse at what this world was like before the sea claimed it. It's both a novel twist and a way to excite fans of the series, of which there are quite a few.

THE SHOWDOWN

■ There is no shortage of great boss battles across the Zelda series, but *Wind Waker*'s final battle with Ganon sits comfortably in the top flight. It's an epic encounter the likes of which few modern games can touch, the music and the setting lending brilliantly to the sense of occasion and importance. But how do you beat him? Well now... that would be telling.

Next
He gave you the Tingle Tuner!
If you get stuck or need a quick hint,
connect a Game Boy Advance to your
Nintendo GameCube to talk to Tingle.

» The Tingle Tuner is sadly absent from the Wii U remake.

» Carrying a really big pig. Just another day at the office…

games. We've really tried to cut back on that, so you can see the same Link across the different platforms."

It's here that design manager Satoru Takizawa jumps in. "We had been trying to figure out which graphical direction to take for the next *Zelda* game. And we wondered whether continuing the path taken by *Ocarina Of Time* and evolving upon it by giving it more detail was really the right path," he revealed in that same 2004 interview. The Space World demo had inadvertently shown the world a *Zelda* game it was not to receive any time soon, but Nintendo was confident in its decision both on visual and gameplay levels. "Another benefit of those visuals was how we could represent the mechanisms and objects for puzzles in a more easy-to-understand way," Takizawa continued. "When the visuals are photorealistic, it had the adverse effect of making information difficult to represent game-wise."

But it wasn't just the style that would prove to be a sticking point for *The Wind Waker* – it was the setting itself. The rolling hills of *Ocarina Of Time* were shunted aside for rolling waves in a controversial twist. But again, it's one that harks back to the series' earlier adventures more than most. *Ocarina* and *Majora* both do a decent job of presenting the illusion of freedom, but with your own ship (and once the good ol' King Of Red Lions allows it), the rolling waves are your very own playground. In earlier games, breaking sequence would simply result in a dead end. Here, the main path may be blocked but there are still other things to investigate and explore – each of the 49 main islands on the map offers something to do whether you're a keyholder or not, some offering extra goodies while others purely tease great rewards once certain key equipment is obtained. Just mapping the whole seascape is its own reward, feeding the fish to fill out the map and make mental (or, if you're proper hardcore, graph paper) notes of what else lies in store once certain gear has been unlocked.

One of the basic prerequisites for exploring the entire map was having the wind on your side, which was apparently something that Nintendo had been meaning to offer players for some time. "For a long time we'd wanted to be able to use wind in games," said Miyamoto. "We'd had windy stages in the *Super Mario* games before, but really it wasn't until we were able to use the technology of the GameCube and some of the visual styles possible with it that we were able to really show wind blowing in a videogame. So, that was one of the things we decided to challenge ourselves with, which made it a driving force behind *The Wind Waker*."

But while other games were roping in voice actors to help flesh out their characters and stories, *The Legend Of Zelda* would remain one told through body language and subtitles. "We obviously carried this on from the previous *Zelda* games," explained Zelda veteran Eiji Aonuma. "We can express what we want within the game without having to use a lot of voice acting. While I can't say for certain it will always be like that with *Zelda* games, the way we did it for *The Wind Waker* is suitable for the world. Also, as people have played *Zelda* over the years, they have formed their own ideas of how Link might sound. If we were to put a voice in there that might not match up with someone's image, then there would be a backlash to that. So we tried to avoid that."

In fact, the real beauty of *Wind Waker* is that so little of it even needs explaining, to the point where we were comfortably able to finish it in Japanese back in the day. This is not a complex story, rather one made interesting by the characters and the life breathed into them by new hardware. "Once we decided to go in ▶

ZELDA HIGHLIGHTS

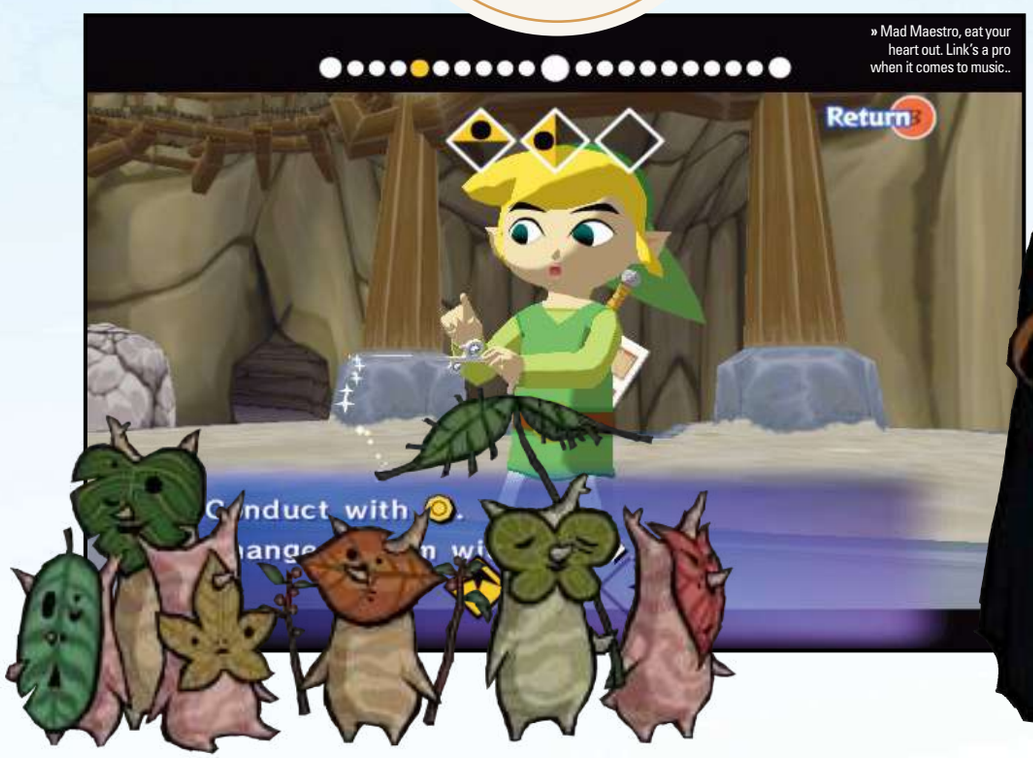
A LINK TO THE PAST (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: SNES
YEAR: 1991

LINK'S AWAKENING DX
SYSTEM: GBC
YEAR: 1998

OCARINA OF TIME
SYSTEM: N64
YEAR: 1998

READERS REMEMBER

"I think *Wind Waker* is a great game, on an epic scale. The sailing can get a bit annoying, especially when you don't play for a while then can't remember where you need to go! But the cel-shaded graphics and gameplay are perfect in my opinion"
FLYING_DELOREAN81



» Mad Maestro, eat your heart out. Link's a pro when it comes to music..

» Link's gadgets work differently when used on the boat.

» Yeah, running away here might not be a terrible plan…

the toon shading direction, we thought it would be important to use the technology as much as possible so we could draw out the natural features of the world," revealed Aonuma. "We wanted to show Link's expressions, and the eyes became very important. Gradually, as we managed to program the movement of the eyes, we began to look at different ways we could make use of that. It became part of the natural process of figuring out how to make Link feel more alive and aware of his surroundings. It was through this natural process that we began to put in items that would attract Link's attention."

And though some feat of game development witchcraft, this relatively simple feature would change the entire game. Link's awareness of his own surroundings became a hint system of sorts, his gaze wandering towards key objects, nearby enemies or puzzle items. It all feels incredibly natural but also helps out on a gameplay level without the need for any intrusive HUD elements or similar modern convention. "When we decided to use the eyes in this way, we considered changing Link's eye color throughout the game," Miyamoto mused. "There were points in the game where we programmed it so his eyes were bright red while he was fighting, and there were some different opinions on that. Obviously, one of the concerns was that you could only see the color of his eyes if the camera was looking at him from the front. But, even if you could see his eyes we thought it felt a little strange. So, ultimately we decided not to do that."

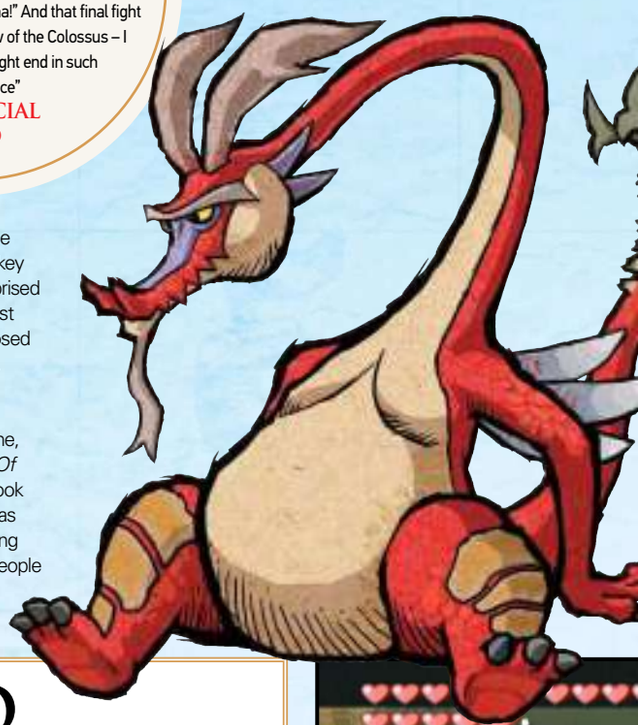
Even so, the wandering eyes and increased emotion evident on Link's face proved to be one of the most popular and memorable features of the game – it isn't often that such emotion can be so easily conveyed by a game character and being able to read and identify with the protagonist so easily and universally was something we had never really seen in a game before. It was an ingenious system, both making the main character seem aware of the world around him while offering gameplay advice at the same time – pause to survey the scene and Link will glance at key objects with the very same eyes that were just surprised by a rogue Moblin, his gaze clearly drawn to the most important thing at that time. Even without the proposed colour changes, it's a mechanic that works brilliantly.

Wind Waker had it all: exploration, innovation, freedom, looks… It's crazy that people aren't falling over themselves to proclaim this the best *Zelda* game, though nostalgia dictates that popular vote *Ocarina Of Time* must be crowned king. But for all the risks it took and innovations it made, we can't see *Wind Waker* as anything less than a prince, and a bloody good-looking one at that. Ultimately, the style is what put many people off and Nintendo knows it. But the risk paid off and Aonuma was so taken with the look that it was his

READERS REMEMBER

"Ganondorf is amazing in this, he gives a speech about the fate of his people and Link's that is threatening, sad and understandable. You could completely understand why he was the way he was, it's the first time I'd seen him with more motive than "bwhahahahahaha!" And that final fight with him outside of Shadow of the Colossus – I don't think I've seen a fight end in such quiet violence"

UNOFFICIAL WHO



WIND WAKER HD

How Nintendo updated the best GameCube Zelda for a new generation of gamers

After successfully bringing *Ocarina Of Time* to a whole new audience with the 3DS remaster, Nintendo's decision to do the same on Wii U didn't come as much of a surprise. Its choice of game, however, did. As much as we love *Wind Waker*, most rumours and speculation pointed towards *Majora's Mask* being next in line for the HD treatment. But we're glad this was the game that won out in the end, if only because the art style lends itself perfectly to a 1080p transition. While *Ocarina* looks great on the smaller screen of the 3DS, the work that would need to be done to get the same clarity on a large TV screen would basically amount to remaking the game from scratch. But with *Wind Waker*'s stylised look, all it takes is some edge smoothing and a few fancy new effects and it looks every bit the modern classic.

So it looks the business in HD – almost exactly as you remember the original looking, in fact – but there has been some tidying up on a gameplay level as well. One of the lengthier fetch quests has been streamlined to improve pacing and flow, while upgraded sails allow users to sail at a much greater pace regardless of wind direction. You can still use the basic sail if you'd rather but, once you've already covered most of the map, it's actually quite nice to have the option of an extra burst of speed – it can even make sailing an enjoyable alternative to simply abusing the fast-travel magic, which has to count for something. There's even a new Hero Mode – in which Link takes double damage and no health hearts can be found in containers or dropped by enemies – if you fancy putting your skills to the test. *Wind Waker* is a legendary game, and the HD remaster absolutely does it justice.

» Cunning swordplay can help to undress armoured guards.

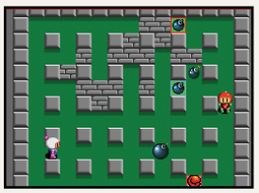
EXTREME MAKEOVER

Other franchises that underwent dramatic changes in look and feel

CASTLEVANIA

BEFORE: SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV
AFTER: CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

■ With a successful string of hardcore action-platformers under its belt, Konami took the brave decision to bring in RPG elements for the series' PlayStation debut. Between stat growth, inventory management and *Metroid*-style map layout that promotes backtracking and exploration, it's little wonder this became the template for most *Castlevania* games that followed.



BOMBERMAN

BEFORE: SUPER BOMBERMAN
AFTER: BOMBERMAN: ACT ZERO

■ There are few franchises that stand to benefit from a gritty reinvention less than *Bomberman* – you might as well make a new *Mario Kart* where Toad drops nailbombs out the window of a stretch Hummer. This grotty Xbox 360 reboot was an utter mess in every respect – it even had a mode called First Person Bomber, which, inexplicably, was third-person. Absolute rubbish.

R-TYPE

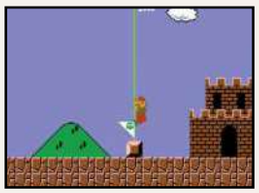
BEFORE: R-TYPE
AFTER: R-TYPE TACTICS

■ *R-Type* is widely regarded as one of the greatest horizontal shooters of all time, delivering fantastic visuals, freakish bosses and exceptional level design. Sequels followed and stuck to the same path, until Irem decided to turn the series into a turn-based strategy game for the PSP in 2007. It feels odd at first, but ends up working surprisingly well. A sequel, also on PSP, followed in 2009.

RESIDENT EVIL

BEFORE: RESIDENT EVIL 2
AFTER: RESIDENT EVIL 4

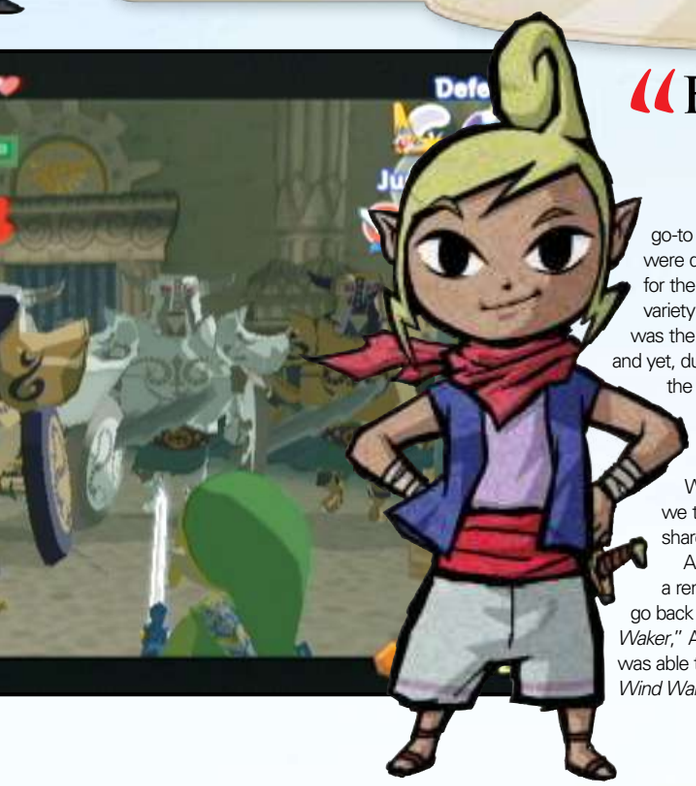
■ Static backgrounds, zombies and hammy horror were all staples of the Capcom franchise until it was time to leave the 32-bit consoles behind. Although *Resident Evil 0* stuck largely to the same formula, *Resi 4* went for an over-the-shoulder camera and made things grittier and more cinematic (not to mention more action-heavy), paving the way for the franchise's current Hollywood-friendly style.



MARIO

BEFORE: SUPER MARIO BROS
AFTER: SUPER MARIO 64

■ Nintendo's mastery of 2D platforming is hard to dispute. But for a launch title to sit alongside its new 64-bit hardware, that wasn't going to cut it. The solution? Borrow *SMB3*'s hub-based structure, befriend the third dimension and both create and define a new genre in the same breath. Yeah, that'll do it. Outside of the *Galaxy* games, it's still the pinnacle of 3D platforming.



"FOR A LONG TIME WE'D WANTED TO BE ABLE TO USE WIND IN GAMES"

Shigeru Miyamoto

go-to style for Link's Wii U debut. "When we were discussing what kind of graphical style to use for the new *Zelda* game on Wii U we looked at a variety of past games as reference. *Wind Waker* was the game that had the most innovative graphics and yet, due to the capabilities of the hardware at the time, it was not able to fully achieve that potential," he tells us. "Thanks to this HD version the developers can now finally make it look like it was always meant to. We decided to release this version because we thought that users would also be able to share in that feeling."

And this, apparently, was the first choice for a remake. "The game that I most wanted to go back to and make it more accessible was *Wind Waker*," Aonuma reveals to us. "I'm really glad that I was able to do that." Fret not though, N64 fans – with *Wind Waker HD* now on the shelves, the next game on the HD checklist might be a little more up your street. "But there is one other title that I have some regrets about in terms of game design because of the very short time we had for development, and that's *Majora's Mask*. I'd like to have a go at that if I get an opportunity." But as much as he (and indeed we) might look forward to that, *Wind Waker* taught Nintendo an important lesson in terms of how much a game's visuals can shake even the most stalwart fan base.

"I think we will be a bit more careful in future, but if we find a new approach that not just the developers, but also the users would enjoy then I think we will want to break new ground again," Aonuma laughs. "But we haven't found such an approach yet…"

Special thanks to Eiji Aonuma. Additional quotes courtesy of Nintendo Of America's official 2004 round table transcription with Shigeru Miyamoto, Satoru Takizawa and Eiji Aonuma.

6
1
15
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16

A LINK TO THE CAST

Your bluffer's guide to the bizarre people that call the Great Sea home

1 **LINK**

■ If you don't know this guy, you're probably reading the wrong magazine. The Hero Of Time reborn, rocking a slick, yet practical green ensemble.

2 **ARYLL**

■ Link's little sister, who gets kidnapped by a giant bird (who mistakes her for Tetra) at the start of the game. Still, at least she gives you her telescope before she gets carted off...

3 **KING OF RED LIONS**

■ A magical boat with a talking figurehead. Still, at least this particular *Zelda* companion doesn't shout 'HEY! LISTEN!' at you every three seconds.

4 **TETRA**

■ The spunky pirate leader that goes easy on Link. She was supposed to have her own game called *Tetra's Trackers*, which only surfaced in Japan and under a different name.

5 **GRANDMA**

■ Has gaming's depiction of the elderly sunk so low that we don't need to give them names any more? Apparently so. Still, Link's granny is a star.

6 **GANONDORF**

■ Again, you've probably had more than a few run-ins with this dude in the past. In keeping with the swashbuckling theme, he seems to prefer swords over magic this time out.

7 **MAKAR**

■ This little *Princess Mononoke* extra plays a mean violin, but that's not the extent of his powers. And no, we don't just mean the cool leaf mask...

8 **MEDLI**

■ There aren't many characters in *Zelda* canon that you get to throw around, so Medli will be remembered for this if nothing else. The young Rito girl is Valoo's attendant.

9 **FADO**

■ The Wind Sage, and the only Kokiri representative to appear in *The Wind Waker*. Apparently he's friends with the original Hero Of Time.

10 **LARUTO**

■ You'd have thought the Zora would be okay after Hyrule was flooded. You'd have thought wrong. The Earth Sage only appears to Link in spirit form.

11 **VALOO**

■ A dragon with an island named after him and the Rito clan looking out for him, Valoo has it pretty good. Well, apart from the huge horrible centipede thing that won't leave his tail alone...

12 **ZEPHOS**

■ The more level of the two Wind God siblings, this cloud-riding frog helps Link out by making sure he learns the Wind's Requiem. And by pointing out that his brother is a bit of a dick.

13 **CYCLOS**

■ The second froggy cloud-rider isn't quite so kind – Link has to try and defeat him amid a hurricane in order to learn the Ballad Of Gales.

14 **KOMALI**

■ A timid Rito prince who is particularly attached to an orb that makes him feel better. An orb that you probably want to get him to part with, somehow...

15 **TINGLE**

■ The midlife crisis, personified. This fairy wannabe just so happens to be really good at deciphering maps, although his rates border on the extortionate.

16 **BEEDLE**

■ A salesman who roams the seas plying his trade. He doesn't often have much of use beyond extra bait, although his friends occasionally carry some useful gear.

17 **FISHMEN**

■ There's one of these talking fish for every square of the map. Track them down and give them dinner and they'll map the area for you, as well as offering a word of obvious advice.

18 **GONZO**

■ The muscle of Tetra's pirate crew. Don't expect much in the way of insight from him but if you ever need anything bashing to bits, he's not a bad person to know.

19 **NUDGE**

■ Tetra's personal bodyguard and the member of her crew who knows her best. He's also apparently stronger than Gonzo but we've seen no proof to that effect.

20 **QUILL**

■ A Rito delivery man who offers a few pieces of sage advice to Link over the course of his journey. When he should probably be delivering letters. The slacker.

THE COMPLETE HISTORY OF
KIRBY

Kirby has had a rocky history, starring in a host of games that range from terrible to genius. Ashley Day and Darran Jones find out why it isn't always easy being pink...

He may have recently appeared in a brand new Switch game and is also due to appear in the latest *Super Smash Bros.* release, but Kirby isn't quite in the A-list of Nintendo stars alongside Mario, Link and Samus, to the extent that his 20th anniversary Wii anthology never even received a release in the UK. So just why is Kirby relegated to the B tier of Nintendo heroes?

Maybe it's because he's an anonymous looking blob of a character; a blank slate whose personality is defined more by the enemies he eats and absorbs than anything inherent in himself. Maybe it's because he began life on the Game Boy rather than the NES or SNES, creating the impression that he's somehow less of a prime-time star. Maybe it's because all of his games are so easy that they feel like they were designed for infants alone rather than the all-ages audience of other Nintendo games. Or maybe it's his track record. Kirby seems to have more cancelled games behind him than any other Nintendo character, and those that do make it onto shelves are of wildly varying quality. The words hit and miss were practically defined by Kirby.

Yet despite all these flaws, Nintendo's unlikely mascot endures. Combined sales of *Kirby* games total a whopping 33 million. He's proved popular enough to gain his own animated TV show. The desk of this particular **Retro Gamer** writer is decorated with not one but two Kirby plushes. And anyone who plays *Super Smash Bros.* with any sense of competition has likely banned Kirby from play for being too darned impossible to beat.

Twenty six odd years into his career, Kirby is defined by one thing: adaptability. Not just in his patented ability to consume enemies and take on their powers and appearance but also in his comfort across a multitude of gaming genres and styles. His classic platformers remain a constant but the round form of Kirby has also seen him take the form of a pinball and golf ball. He's starred in a *Breakout* clone, a *Marble Madness* style game and one of the most esoteric racers ever created. The little guy has even appeared in a game made entirely from wool.

Kirby began life as a sprite called Popopo in a game called Twinkle Popopo, which became Kirby's Dreamland

This versatility almost certainly dates all the way back to Kirby's origins. Created by Masahiro Sakurai of HAL Laboratory in 1992, Kirby actually began life as a placeholder sprite called Popopo in a game called *Twinkle Popopo*... Which eventually became *Kirby's Dreamland*. His placeholder nature perfectly explains Kirby's appearance – a simple round blob with stubby limbs and basic facial features has got to be one of the easiest and quickest characters to draw. As development of the game progressed however, Sakurai gradually fell in love with the placeholder design and decided to keep him.

Popopo was eventually renamed Kirby, though Sakurai claims to not remember why. Some speculate that he was named

» *Kirby's Block Ball* is one of the few unique interpretations of *Breakout* that exist. Well done, Kirby!

» *Pinball Land* is part of a lineage of fantastic HAL pinball games, including *Revenge Of The Gator*.

after the Kirby vacuum cleaner company, due to his ability to suck up enemies and other objects, while others suggest he is named after the lawyer John Kirby who represented Nintendo in the *Donkey Kong/King Kong* dispute with Universal Studios. The latter theory is certainly the most likely, given that Mario was also named after a close associate of Nintendo's.

Though *Kirby's Dreamland* featured a number of series hallmarks, including Kirby's ability to suck in and spit out objects, as well as the now iconic and oft repeated tree boss of the first stage, his more popular copy ability was not yet present. Similarly, though Sakurai had envisioned Kirby as a pink character, his debut on Game Boy didn't demonstrate this characteristic and this aspect of the character design was lost outside of Japan, with Nintendo's western arm depicting Kirby as a completely white character on the game's box art and other marketing materials. With origins like this, it's easy to see how Kirby became such a versatile, adaptable hero, capable of appealing to a wide group of people.

Sakurai originally envisioned Kirby as the star of a basic game that anyone could play, and it certainly shows in Dreamland. His ability to float across an entire stage made most of the game free of conflict or obstacle and the whole thing could be completed in under an hour. Fortunately, the NES sequel *Kirby's Adventure* added some much needed complexity in addition to Kirby's true bright pink colour. This game, released in 1993, introduced the ability to copy the powers of the enemies Kirby consumed and also introduced a slightly more complex level structure and a host of mini-game rooms, which extended the size of the game enough to necessitate a battery-backed save function. It also expanded the cast of characters, the first game's penguin villain King Dedede now joined by anti-hero Meta Knight, who would go on to become one of the most popular and iconic Kirby characters.

» The Kirby we know and love today really took shape with Kirby's Adventure

KIRBY'S SPIN-OFFS

Kirby has had almost as many spin-off games as he has main platform games. Some may even say that the spin-offs are his best works… And you know what, they'd be right

Kirby's Pinball Land
Game Boy, 1993

Actually the second *Kirby* game ever made, Pinball Land proved just how versatile a character Kirby is. This remains one his best games. Programmed by Satoru Iwata at HAL, it followed the developer's other pinball games, *Rollerball* and *Revenge Of The Gator*, and built upon a great track record for multi-level pinball tables that did things totally impossible in the real thing. Three tables, each with their own high score board made this an infinitely replayable classic.

Kirby's Dream Course
SNES, 1994

Originally conceived as a mini-golf game called *Special Tee Shot*, this evolved into something more interesting. In *Dream Course*, players hit Kirby around an isometric golf course, taking out any enemy he strikes, with the final one transforming into the hole. Each hit takes one life while each enemy struck replaces one, rewarding accuracy. The game featured eight courses, with eight holes, as well as another four two-player only eight-hole courses.

Kirby's Ghost Trap
SNES, 1995

Also known as *Kirby's Avalanche* in the US, *Ghost Trap* is a port of Japan's *Super Puyo Puyo*. Before the *Puyo Puyo* series became well known in the west, developer Compile licenced it to other publishers, who would apply a more well-known property over the top, like Sega's *Mean Bean Machine*, starring Sonic's Dr Robotnik. *Ghost Trap* used sprites and music from *Kirby's Adventure* and *Kirby's Dream Course* but is otherwise a *Puyo Puyo* game.

Kirby's Block Ball
Game Boy, 1995

Yes, *Block Ball* suffered from the same clunky controls of all non-analogue *Breakout* clones but it made up for it with some unique mechanics. Hitting A at the same time as striking a ball would inflate it into a full-sized Kirby, capable of hitting more bricks at once and with more power, while boss battles used four paddles at once, one on each edge of the screen. A huge battery-backed adventure and tons of mini-games made it more than just a simple arcade clone.

Kirby's Toy Box
Super Famicom, 1996

A series of mini-games that were broadcast on the Super Famicom's obscure Satellaview add-on, *Kirby's Toy Box* included eight mini-games, themed around Kirby as a ball, and included such simple games as baseball, pinball and pachinko. Though there was also a nice little artillery clone called *Cannonball*. The series was designed to promote the cartridge release of *Kirby Super Star* and can now only be played via emulation.

Kirby Star Stacker
Game Boy, 1997

Every Nintendo mascot seems to get their own puzzle game at some point and this was Kirby's (remember that *Ghost Trap* was really a *Puyo Puyo* game). Sadly, *Star Stacker* wasn't very good. With gameplay between *Mario & Yoshi* and Sega's *Baku Baku Animal*, it wasn't simple enough to be instantly accessible but nowhere near complex enough to be engrossing. A Super Famicom remake was made in 1998 but had few improvements.

Kirby Tilt 'n' Tumble
Game Boy Color, 2000

Game Boy Color never really got a proper *Kirby* platformer (a DX remake of *Dream Land 2* was announced but never released) but it did get this interesting curiosity. Featuring a motion sensor in the cartridge itself, it played like a ball-bearing maze game by tilting the entire handheld around. Sadly it never got a European release and the tilt technology makes it highly unlikely that we'll see a Virtual Console re-release any time soon.

Kirby Air Ride
GameCube, 2003

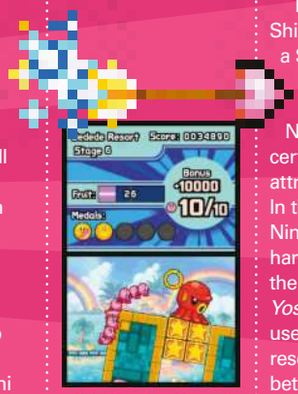
Masahiro Sakurai returned to the *Kirby* series after several years away for this odd racer in which the only button was a brake, designed to build up tension on corners before letting go to slingshot out of them. An interesting but unsatisfying idea. A wealth of bonus content, and the way it was unlocked, however, influenced later Sakurai games *Super Smash Bros* and *Kid Icarus: Uprising*.

Two years later Kirby returned to the Game Boy in *Kirby's Dream Land 2*. Incorporating the copy ability from the NES game, it also expanded the gameplay possibilities by adding three of Kirby's mates to the mix. Rick the hamster, Coo the owl and Kine the fish may be three of the worst names and least memorable characters in Nintendo history but they at least prove invaluable in *Dream Land 2*. Each carries Kirby in some way – he rides on Rick's back, can be carried in the talons of Coo and, most amusingly, can sit in the mouth of Kine as they swim around – and the best thing about this is that when Kirby absorbs the power of an enemy it not only transforms him but also his pal, adding an ability specific to that helper. Such variety and depth makes *Dream Land 2* a great game and it just might be the best of the classic Kirby games.

Dream Land 2 is also notable as one of the best Super Game Boy-compatible cartridges. When played through the SNES's woefully underused Game Boy playing peripheral, it added custom borders themed around Kirby's animal chums, included new sound effects such as applause on the title screen and thunder during the end sequence, as well as custom colour palettes that created a stunning ending that used the maximum number of colours the Super Game Boy would allow.

The following year, however, Kirby made his debut on Super NES proper and in a game that saw Sakurai return to the director's chair (*Dream Land 2* was directed by fellow HAL employee Shinichi Shimomura). *Kirby Super Star* (or *Kirby's Fun Pak* as it was known in Europe) was a typically inventive release from Sakurai. Advertised as eight games on one cartridge, its main feature was *Spring Breeze*, an extremely colourful remake of *Dream Land* that incorporated new gameplay features including the copy ability as well as the option to transform any of those abilities into a helper character that could, if one desired, be controlled by a second player. A few shorter platform games appear on the cart but, more interesting, is the presence of games like *The Great Cave Offensive*, a treasure-hunting adventure game packed with references to other Nintendo titles, or *Revenge Of Meta Knight*, in which Kirby must race against the clock to destroy his rival's spaceship, the Halberd. Packed with countless hours of gameplay across several original game modes, *Kirby Super Star* was naturally popular and, appearing on what was arguably the most owned console of its day, it sold millions and remains a favourite among fans.

» We've certainly seen better uses of the DS's touch screen than this.



» *Kirby Mass Attack* is one of the better Kirby games.

The next game in the core series saw Shimomura return to make *Dream Land 3*, a Super NES sequel that arrived so late in the system's life that it went unreleased in Europe due to the arrival of the N64. Which is a shame because Europe certainly missed out on one of the most attractive SNES games if nothing else. In the post-*Donkey Kong Country* era, Nintendo platform games had to try much harder to stand out visually, which led to the crayon story book feel of Miyamoto's *Yoshi's Island*, while *Dream Land 3* instead used a special and oft-overlooked high-resolution screen mode to bleed colours between pixels, giving the games a pastel-like look that achieved a blurry, dreamlike quality befitting the title. For the gameplay, HAL added three new animal pals to the existing roster, as well as Gooey, a helper character Kirby can summon at the cost of two hit points who fights alongside Kirby, controlled either by AI or another player. In spite of the rich visuals, *Dream Land 3* was exactly what the title suggested, an iterative continuation of the series that lacked the true innovation of *Super Star*, and is

KIRBY'S CAMEOS

Being a popular Nintendo mascot, Kirby has made cameo appearances in a number of other games, not least the Super Smash Bros series, which was made by Kirby creator Masahiro Sakurai. Here are some of his others:

- In *The Legend Of Zelda: Link's Awakening*, Link is attacked by an enemy called the Anti-Kirby that can suck him up and spit him out.
- In *Mario & Luigi Superstar Saga* there's a cinema with posters on the wall. One features Kirby in a film called *Kirby Story*.
- In the opening to HAL's SNES RPG two Kirbys can be seen in a crowd of warriors.
- In *Pokemon Stadium 2* you can view a 3D representation of your character's room. If they own a NES then the TV displays a scene from *Kirby's Adventure*, and if they own a SNES then you'll see a scene from *Kirby Super Star*.
- Kirby is on billboards in the *Super FX* racer *Stunt Race FX*.
- Several Kirby characters appear as the solutions to puzzles in Super Famicom's *Picross Volume 3*.
- In the menu to 3DS augmented reality game *Face Raiders*, three enemies can be seen doing the famous Kirby Dance performed throughout the series. Which looks a little like this: <(':<)(^':<) (^':^) <(':')> (^':^) (>':^)(>':')>

Variety and depth makes Dream Land 2 a great game, and it might just be the best of the Kirby games

» *Kirby's Adventure* added mini-game distractions, which are a central part of the series.

» The Game Boy Advance *Kirby* games are decent enough but do lack a certain amount of originality.

» The GBA *Kirby* games were great for the handheld's younger audience, but that was about it.

KIRBY'S CANCELLED GAMES

It's not easy to make a Kirby game, or so it seems. There have been quite a few that were announced but never made it to the shelves…

Kirby's Air Ride 64

Originally announced as *Kirby Bowl 64*, this would have been a sort of sequel to *Dream Course* and involved rolling a spherical Kirby around a 3D environment. It later expanded to include airboard gliding sections and was renamed *Kirby's Air Ride*. Though it features some similarities to the *Kirby Air Ride* eventually released on GameCube it's actually a significantly different game.

Kirby Tilt 'n' Tumble 2

A 3D sequel to the Game Boy Color game, this would have been a GameCube game controlled by a special GBA cart, connected to a GBA and plugged into the GameCube. With so much specialist hardware required, it's easy to see why the project would have been abandoned. It would work pretty well on the Wii U GamePad, however, so maybe the idea will be revived one day.

Kid Kirby

In development at DMA Design, the studio behind *Lemmings* and *Unirally*, *Kid Kirby* was to star an infant version of Kirby in a platform-puzzle game to be controlled using the SNES mouse. But when the mouse proved unpopular, DMA tested standard joypad controls, found them unsuitable and ceased production of the game. All that remains are a few debug screens available on programmer Mike Dailly's Flickr page.

Kirby GCN1

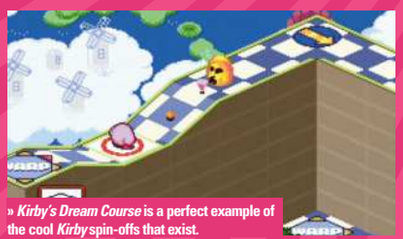
GameCube Kirby went through three different incarnations before it was eventually scrapped and revived as *Kirby's Return To Dream Land* on Wii. The first unreleased *GCN* game was a platform game that featured three helper characters who could team up with Kirby by all stacking on top of him like a playable totem pole. Like *Return To Dream Land*, it would allow four people to play at once.

Kirby GCN2

The second iteration of the GameCube game would have featured a full 3D levels, viewed from a sort of isometric perspective and, in a bold change for the series, especially challenging gameplay. While this probably would have been one for the fans, we'll never know. Nintendo has only released one screen shot of the game, saying that it never reached the quality required for release.

Kirby GCN3

The third and final GameCube *Kirby* game would have been a traditional 2D platform game, complete with copy abilities, except it would have featured extremely high-resolution 2D visuals, good enough to match the anime that was airing at the time, *Kirby, Right Back At Ya!*, known as *Kirby Of The Stars* in Japan. Again, only one screen was ever released and nothing else is known.



» *Kirby's Dream Course* is a perfect example of the cool *Kirby* spin-offs that exist.

» The DS was instrumental in bringing new ideas to *Kirby*, as *Mass Attack* demonstrated.

Epic Yarn was Kirby on a full-on charm offensive. One of the easiest games of its type, but stunning

one of the reasons the Kirby series has a negative reputation for repetition and over-familiarity – the other being an especially high number of remakes.

Following *Dream Land 3*, the *Kirby* series fell into a bit of a slump. While some of the spin-off games were genuinely excellent, the main series became plagued by cancellations and mediocre releases. Next up was *Kirby 64: The Crystal Shards*, a particularly disappointing sequel in the context of its time. While *Mario* and *Zelda* transitioned into the 3D era with world-class productions that defined the way games would be designed for the next decade on, *Kirby* stuck to the same old tired template. The short length and easy gameplay, meanwhile, sat uneasily with fans who were expected to pay premium prices for costly N64 cartridges. Out of context, *Kirby 64* is a fun, colourful and playable *Kirby* adventure, but this was the point at which the series should and could have been reborn into something new and exciting. It didn't happen, and we're arguably still waiting for that evolution 18 years later.

Kirby's nadir continued in 2002 with the release of *Nightmare In Dreamland*,

a Game Boy Advance remake of *Kirby's Adventure* that added new mini-games and a multiplayer mode. Another short and easy game, as well as a retread, it did little to endear Kirby to the hardcore, although it did sell well with the GBA's massive audience of children. The next game on GBA was significantly better, however.

A co-development between HAL, Dimps and *Zelda: Oracles Of Ages/Seasons* developer Flagship, *Kirby & The Amazing Mirror* was an ambitious *Kirby* game that wrapped the familiar gameplay in a *Metroidvania* structure and threw in three AI Kirbys that could be summoned to help by using a magical mobile phone – as long as it had enough battery power left. An extremely long and deep *Kirby* game, *Amazing Mirror* suffered from a confusing map system and core gameplay that didn't quite evolve the series enough but it was certainly a step in the right direction after the previous few games. If you're an early adopter of 3DS, it's also sitting on your system right now, as it was one of twenty games in Nintendo's Ambassador Program, following the unexpected price drop in 2011.

In 2005, Kirby finally got the burst of inspiration he deserved. Inspired by the touch screen controls of the Nintendo DS, *Kirby: Power Paintbrush* was an entirely touch-controlled platform game in which Kirby appeared as a completely circular character and was manipulated indirectly, by drawing a limited rainbow path for him to follow on-screen. It was an early DS breakthrough that demonstrated how new technology could be used to bring innovation to classic franchises and sold the DS to gamers in ways that *Brain Training* and *Nintendogs* could only dream of.

So did Kirby enter a new age of constant re-invention? Sadly not. The next game, also co-produced with Flagship, was *Kirby: Mouse Attack*, a traditional Kirby game in the vein of *Amazing Mirror* that added only iterative features such as the ability to level up or combine copy abilities. It was a decent platformer but a disappointing one after the runaway inventiveness of *Power Paintbrush*. *Kirby Super Star Ultra* followed in 2008. A remake of the SNES game, it featured enhanced visuals and threw in several new mini-games, but the series had become a little ho-hum again by this point and *Super Star Ultra* went mostly ignored.

» This tree boss appeared in the first stage of *Kirby's Dream Land* and has been a staple part of the *Kirby* series ever since.

» Even the lovable Kirby has a violent streak to him.

» Kirby has leant himself to several genres over time.

» *Kirby's Epic Yarn* remains one of the best looking and most original *Kirby* games.

As is now typical of Kirby, it wasn't long before he got out of his funk again, and in 2010 he bounced back with one of the best games in the series. Developed by the ex-Konami veterans at Good-Feel, *Kirby's Epic Yarn* reinvented our hero and his world as a game made entirely from wool and other fabrics. Not just an original art style, it allowed the aesthetic to inspire the gameplay and had you pulling back curtains in the levels, unravelling threads, popping buttons or even dipping beneath the fabric of a level's background to reveal secrets. *Epic Yarn* was Kirby on a full-on charm offensive. It was still one of the easiest games of its type but the stunning presentation and inviting world begged you to play and kept you interested in ways the previous games sometimes struggled to.

And if by now you thought the tradition was to follow up an innovative *Kirby* title with a dull one then Nintendo had a surprise in store. 2011's *Kirby Mass Attack* may have been the fourth *Kirby* title to appear on DS but it was far from tired. Incorporating elements of the RTS genre, it returned to stylus-based touch screen controls and had you manipulating up to ten Kirbys at once in a puzzle-platformer hybrid that, perhaps for the first time in the series history, really got the balance right between fun and challenge.

Also that year was the last *Kirby* game so far. Titled *Return To Dream Land* in the US and *Kirby's Adventure Wii* in the UK, this was the first traditional *Kirby* game to appear on a home console since *Kirby 64* but was much less disappointing. A traditional side-scroller, it adds drop-in/drop-out four-player co-op, in which players can all be Kirby or pick from one of his co-stars King Dedede, Meta Knight or Waddle Dee. Each of these has their own special abilities while Kirby plays as normal, even able to suck up other players and spit them out as projectiles. Rightly overlooked next to the superior *Epic Yarn*, *Return To Dream Land* is a nevertheless entertaining game that sits proudly alongside Wii's other co-op platformers *New Super Mario Bros Wii* and *Donkey Kong Country Returns*.

To celebrate Kirby's 20th anniversary, Nintendo released a compilation, called *Kirby's Dream Collection*. Released in 2012 it featured six key games in the series: *Dream Land 1-3*, *Adventure*, *Super Star* and *Kirby 64* and was released on a single disc alongside some new stages that are based on *Return To Dream Land*. All the games are controllable using the Wii Remote (held horizontally of course) and it also features support for the Classic Controller. You can suspend play whenever you want and there's an excellent museum section that is full of interesting Kirby trivia and history. Additionally it includes a lovely outer sleeve and a music CD. Unfortunately, *Dream Collection* was only released in Japan and North America, meaning it's become something of a collector's item today.

Kirby's next adventure took place on the Nintendo 3DS in 2014 and it proved to be a fantastic return to form for the lovable pink blob. While

» There's a wide range of suits to try out in *Planet Robobot* and many are brilliant fun.

it's a fairly conventional platformer for the most part, *Triple Deluxe* makes great use of the system's 3D to deliver some fantastic effects as Kirby seemingly jumps in and out of the screen. Motion controls are also used on some stages, while a brand-new ability called Hypernova greatly increases Kirby's inhale ability. Like previous *Kirby* games, *Triple Deluxe* also features some fun sub-games, *Kirby Fighters* and *Dedede's Drum Dash*. In fact, both titles proved popular enough to be released on Nintendo eShop as enhanced standalone releases.

If the first 3DS game turned out to be a good debut for Kirby, the same couldn't be said for Kirby's one and only Wii U release. *Kirby And The Rainbow Curse* made its debut in 2015 and is a sequel to the brilliant *Kirby: Power Paintbrush*. Immediately distinctive thanks to its excellent art style which depicts everything in the game as if it's made of clay, *Rainbow Curse* suffers from being a little too faithful to the DS game's mechanics. It's a lot easier to switch between the DS's screens than it is to swap between a TV and the Wii U's tablet screen, and as a result *Rainbow Curse* loses a lot of its charm.

Fortunately, things picked up considerably for Kirby's second retail 3DS release, the rather excellent *Kirby: Planet Robobot*, which was released in 2016. As its name suggests, *Planet Robobot* allows Kirby to stomp around in giant mechanised suits, which in turn help to shake things up in the mechanics department. There are a large number of different suits to master and the game's levels ensure they're typically utilised in a number of clever ways. It also features more excellent-looking 3D effects and is arguably one of the nicer-looking games on the system. Kirby retains all his moves from the earlier *Triple Deluxe*, but he also has the ability to carry certain objects underwater and climb grates. Again, it's not the hardest game to master

It's unclear what Hal Laboratory and Nintendo have in store for Kirby in the future, but it's clear that we've not seen the end of the lovable puffball

» Kirby will feature in *Super Smash Bros Ultimate* along with every other character that's ever appeared in the series.

» *Star Allies* has a big focus on multiplayer, but it's not a particularly deep game.

» Bizarrely, *Kirby's Extra Epic Yarn* won't be in 3D. It's still a great game, mind.

(*Kirby* games aren't known for their tough challenge) but it is a lot of fun to play.

As with *Kirby Triple Deluxe*, Nintendo expanded the two sub-games found in *Planet Robobot* and released them on the Nintendo eShop. The two games in question, *Blowout Blast* and *Team Kirby Clash Deluxe* are fun little diversions and are certainly worth investigating.

It's also worth pointing out that in addition to starring in his own games during this period, the lovable mascot was also making guest appearances in numerous other games, ensuring that he was always in the public eye. In addition to appearing in the snappily named *Super Smash Bros For Nintendo 3DS* and *Super Smash Bros For Wii U*, he also cropped up in *NES Remix*, which takes existing NES games and adds small micro challenges to them. He also appeared prominently in the fun, but shortly-lived *Nintendo Badge Arcade*, which enabled you to win badges from a grabber machine, many of which were based around some classic *Kirby* characters and enemies.

» *Rainbow Curse* looks absolutely sensational, but the gameplay mechanics don't match the glorious visuals.

» Levels often take place on two planes in *Triple Deluxe*, creating a neat 3D effect.

2018 saw Nintendo releasing a brand-new *Kirby* game on the Switch in the form of *Kirby Star Allies*. As its name suggests, the big drawer in *Star Allies* revolves around turning your foes into friends. By throwing hearts at enemies it's possible to turn your enemies into allies, who will then help you to finish the stage. These allies are either controlled by the computer or by friends and it's possible to team up with three other players. Furthermore it's possible for Kirby to combine his abilities with allies to create all-new fusions. While it's something of a love letter to the earlier games in the series, *Star Allies* is tremendously short and easy, even for a *Kirby* game, and it failed to connect with fans.

Kirby's story doesn't end just yet however. A new *Smash Bros* game, *Super Smash Bros Ultimate*, is due at the end of 2018 and features Kirby, as well as every other character that has ever appeared in the series. There's at least one more *Kirby* game heading to 3DS in 2019 in the form of *Kirby's Extra Epic Yarn*, which is a remake of the well-received Wii game. It promises additional power-ups and game modes, as well as brand-new sub-games, but annoyingly, it won't utilise the console's 3D capabilities, which feels like a big oversight considering how well it's worked on the likes of *Triple Deluxe* and *Planet Robobot*.

It's unclear what Hal Laboratory and Nintendo have in store for Kirby in the future, but it's clear that we've not seen the end of the lovable puffball. *Kirby Star Allies* might not have been the most critically acclaimed *Kirby* game, but with sales in the US making it the most popular *Kirby* game of all time (it outsold *Kirby: Nightmare In Dreamland* by 90 per cent) we'd imagine that Hal is already considering a follow-up, if it isn't making one already. *Kirby* games might not always push the boat out in terms of innovation, but they always tend to be bright, colourful and fun, which probably explains why he's been able to entertain gamers for 26 years. ✱

FIRE EMBLEM™ -Shadows of Valentia- Echoes

The latest Fire Emblem game isn't a new game at all, being a remake of the second Famicom game, Gaiden. Darran Jones asks franchise veterans about updating a 26-year-old game for a brand-new audience

***Fire Emblem* is probably considered a relatively new retro franchise to most of our readers as it made its debut in the west on the Game Boy Advance.** While that first GBA release didn't arrive here until 2003, it was the seventh game in the series, having made its debut in Japan on the Famicom in 1990.

"We thought that *Fire Emblem* was a game that would only work in Japan," explains Nintendo's Hitoshi Yamagami, a producer on the new game. "We were releasing it in the West, hoping people would enjoy it. It turned out people liked it more than we'd imagined. Once we learned this, we've made an effort to release them in the West, too."

» Intelligent Systems has worked hard to ensure that battles are more fluid than ever.

» Exploring dungeons is another aspect of *Gaiden* that has been overhauled for *Echoes*.

That effort also included releasing *Fire Emblem: Shadow Dragon* on DS in 2008, which was an enhanced remake of the original *Fire Emblem* game that allowed newer fans of the series to discover how the franchise first began. There was also *Fire Emblem: New Mystery Of The Emblem*, a remake of the first Super Famicom game that was a Japanese exclusive at the time. Nintendo has decided that it's time to go back for a third time, and this time it's revisiting *Fire Emblem Gaiden*, the last Famicom *Fire Emblem* game and the first to be developed solely by Intelligent Systems. The real question, however, is why now?

"After development on *Fire Emblem Fates* was finished, Intelligent Systems said that there were several things they were unable to do in that game, so they wanted to create another game on Nintendo 3DS," continues Yamagami. "However, at the time we were just starting to think about a new product for Nintendo Switch, and we wouldn't be able to give a lot of time to this Nintendo 3DS game. So the beginning was this decision to create one more game, even as a remake, before the Nintendo Switch release."

Kenta Nakanishi, a director at Nintendo, has his own reasons for wanting to revisit *Gaiden* and one of them is extremely personal. "It hadn't been released overseas, and it was very compatible with various ideas we were unable to do in *Fire Emblem Fates*," he begins. "On a more personal note, I lost my father at an early age and had played the *Fire Emblem Gaiden* software that was among his belongings over and over while thinking of him. So I had very strong feelings about *Fire Emblem Gaiden*, and boldly thought I wanted to do a remake and have many people play it. This time, partially due to the aforementioned background, it was decided we could create a remake of *Fire Emblem Gaiden* and I'm very deeply moved by it."

Yamagami actually has additional ties to *Echoes*, as he was involved with the original game as a

» New cutscenes will give greater insight into the story that *Echoes* is based on.

» *Fire Emblem Echoes* retains the overworld map that first featured in *Gaiden*.

debugger. "I had done debugging for the first game, *Shadow Dragon* and *Blade Of Light*, so I took charge of it for *Fire Emblem Gaiden* after that, but the rules are completely different from the first game and it was difficult," he recalls. "I remember I had a very hard time. Even now, I'm reminded of being beaten again and again by the Mogalls who appear towards the end of the game. A Casual Mode has been added to this game making it more accessible. I'm very interested in what customers today feel about the *Fire Emblem Gaiden* game I originally debugged."

Fortunately, numerous patches exist which enable gamers to experience *Fire Emblem Gaiden* in English. It's certainly worth investigating, as it's a very different beast to the original *Fire Emblem*. Unlike other games in the series it featured small dungeons and an overworld map that could be navigated by the player, as well as new mechanics like branching promotion trees for villagers, default weapons that would never break, towns that could be freely explored, support for certain characters and much more. Many felt at the time of release that the changes diluted the strategy found in the earlier game and it's telling that Intelligent Systems would drop many of these mechanics in later games.

Now, those mechanics are being embraced in the remake and it's a way of freshening up the series for a hungry audience who might not realise that the new game mechanics they are experiencing were first introduced 26 years previously. With *Fire Emblem Gaiden* currently available on the Virtual Console in Japan it's been relatively easy for Intelligent Systems to rediscover the strengths and weaknesses of its old game. Toshiyuki Kusakihara, one of Intelligent Systems' directors was only too happy to explain ▶

THE DNA OF FIRE EMBLEM ECHOES: SHADOWS OF VALENTIA

It may be familiar, but Intelligent Systems has made some tweaks

GRID-BASED MOVEMENT

■ The old-school movement of *Gaiden* remains so you'll be moving that cursor around quite a lot during the course of your campaign.

TINY HEROES

■ The overview screens of *Echoes* retain the distinctive style of the original Famicom sprites, albeit with added detail.

A TOUGH CHALLENGE

■ Although Mila's Turnwheel does make the remake a lot easier, there's still the option to not using it, emulating the toughness of the original game, *Gaiden*.

STAT CITY

■ Early *Fire Emblem* games always had an insane amount of stat-based skills to juggle and *Echoes* is no exception.

▶ how important that Virtual Console release of *Gaiden* became to the new team charged with remaking it. "Half of the staff played on their own Nintendo 3DS and each did research independently," he tells us. "That game was from 26 years ago, so we were struggling from the stage of accurately understanding the original game's specifications. One cause of that was that there aren't many of the original staff left. For example, the source code for *Gaiden* was noted in the Famicom programming language (assembler), but it's a language that is not used much anymore, so there were few programmers on the team who could handle that, and it took a fair amount of effort to do the analysis. For the AI, too, we had to decode the assembler language from the Famicom version and create custom AI from *Fates*, so that enemies would behave like in the original."

Team sizes have also changed since *Gaiden* was released something, which has also impacted on *Echoes*, as Masahiro Higuchi, a producer at Intelligent Systems explains. "There were about ten main staff members at Intelligent Systems which produced the original *Fire Emblem Gaiden*," he begins. "That's the same number of people doing sound on this game. The total number of people involved in the project has increased considerably compared to the original *Fire Emblem Gaiden*, and I think it's probably more than 20 times as many. This is because the number of things we must create has increased together with the evolution of hardware and the increase in available data capacity."

Although the team is far larger than before, Kusakihara still wanted the strengths of *Gaiden* to shine through in the new update and while he

MEET THE CAST

The key characters of Fire Emblem Echoes: Shadows Of Valentia

GRAY
■ Gray is one of Alm's oldest friends and joins him on his new adventure. He's an easygoing member of the group but lacks self-awareness and can often end up getting in trouble.

CLIVE
■ Clive is the founder of the Deliverance, a group of fighters that Alm comes into contact with. He's a member of the upper aristocracy and started off as a knight before founding his new company.

MAE
■ Although she's Celica's servant, she's also a close friend of the priestess and a skilled mage in her own right. She has a rivalry with Boey (pictured above right), who has sworn to protect Celica at all costs.

VALBAR
■ This heavily-armoured fighter lives life to the fullest and will happily help anyone in need, regardless of the possible consequences. While he was performing his knightly duties pirates killed his family.

ALM
■ This feisty 17-year-old is one of *Echoes*' primary protagonists. He heavily values justice and is often considered reckless by those that know him. He's the friend of Celica and can be extremely stubborn.

CELICA
■ Celica is Alm's childhood friend who was separated from him when they were still young. She can come across as cold and standoffish, but it's because she carries a lot of responsibility on her young shoulders.

» It wouldn't be a *Fire Emblem* game without an insane amount of characters to level up. You're going to need every available experience point.

» The battles of *Echoes* take place over a variety of different locations, including boats.

stressed to us that he wanted the RPG elements of the original to feature, he also knew the gameplay had to be updated for a new gamer generation. "From the very beginning I definitely wanted to make it possible for the player to actually walk around on the continent of Valentia, such as in dungeons, and be able to feel a sense of oneness with the main character," he explains. "In the previous game, *Fire Emblem Fates*, there is a 'My Castle' feature where you have a base you can edit. Initially the plan was to make it possible to walk around this base, but we weren't able to polish this to a level that would satisfy as a commercial product, so by necessity we had to keep it to looking at surroundings while watching over the main character's shoulder. This time I think we were able to properly tie up loose ends there. We are [also] implementing elements that were in the original but not displayed on screen, so most players probably hadn't noticed, such as things like experience from taking part in a battle or support-related things, and [we have] made them easier to notice."

While everyone on the team wanted to modernise *Gaiden* for a new audience, it has still been an concerted effort to ensure that *Echoes* stays true to its source material, which has created numerous technical issues for Kusakirara and his team to solve. "This time, there are lots of creative things included in things like animation during battle, and it has been kicked up a notch in accordance with three themes: faster pacing, better visuals, and including an homage to the original game," he continues. "Particularly in terms of pacing, we're doing things like having characters pull out their sword as they run onto screen at start of battle or combining the evasion and the counterattack together. So each and every action feels more naturally connected." Pacing

» *Fire Emblem Echoes* will be the first main game in the series to feature full voice acting for in-game dialogue.

> *"We had to decode the assembler language from the Famicom version and create custom AI from Fates, so that enemies would behave like in the original"*
>
> Toshiyuki Kusakirara

was also paramount to Higuchi, as well as solving the issue of the 'weapon triangle', which has always been a key mechanic of the series. "For game quality, we're adjusting some parameters to place emphasis on a faster sense of pacing while following the original game as much as possible," he explains. "Although the current *Fire Emblem* games have the 'weapon triangle', this wasn't in the original, and instead of using this, players had to use the terrain to their advantage. This style of battle may feel new to users familiar with the weapon triangle system."

A brand-new ability that may upset hardcore fans of the series is 'Mila's Turnwheel', which allows gamers to rewind previous moves that may have led to a character's demise. It seems out of character for a series that once embraced permadeath gameplay (when a character dies, they're dead for good) but Kusakirara has a good reason for its inclusion. "It may seem surprising, but the reason we introduced this system was that we wanted users to enjoy it more as a strategy game," he tells us. "*Fire Emblem* is a game where the fun is in the high difficulty. However we thought that at the same time it was important to lower the barriers for new players so they could become interested in it too. The main goal with Mila's Turnwheel was to make users actually think about what other ways there could be to beat the situation by rewinding time when they lose, and so have them experiment and try new things."

It might not be as well known as some of its bigger franchises, but it's clear that both Nintendo and Intelligent designs have a lot of love for *Fire*

» Archers are going to be a lot deadlier in *Echoes*, so plan your approach accordingly.

Emblem and want to share that love with fans. "One of the themes we had in development was wanting customers that only knew *Fire Emblem* after *Fire Emblem Awakening* was released to enjoy the older games in the series too," concludes Nakanishi." Yamagami is also proud of the game, but feels there are plenty of new elements that substantially build on the 26-year-old original. "I'd just like to say that although *Echoes* is technically a remake, I'd like people to play it without thinking of it as such. The original title was never released in Europe and it's been remade so thoroughly that the staff from the original game were so surprised [they] could barely recognise it. Also the game system and visuals are very much on par with a completely new game, so I hope you can enjoy it as our ultimate work on Nintendo 3DS."

It's unclear whether any more *Fire Emblem* games will be remade at this moment in time, but with a constant furry of brand-new games on the horizon, what is clear is that Nintendo has plenty of faith in its long-running franchise. ★

THE HISTORY OF YOSHI

ORIGINALLY INTRODUCED AS MARIO'S TRUSTY DINOSAUR STEED, **YOSHI** HAS BECOME A REAL STAR IN HIS OWN RIGHT, APPEARING IN A SERIES OF PLATFORM GAMES INCLUDING SOME OF NINTENDO'S MOST CHERISHED CLASSICS. SADDLE UP NICK THORPE RIDES THROUGH YOSHI'S PAST...

If there's one thing we've learned over the years, it's that Shigeru Miyamoto is a persistent sort of chap. When he gets an idea, he'll pursue it until it finally becomes reality – and it's that persistence that gave the world Yoshi. After the original *Super Mario Bros* game, Miyamoto felt that Mario needed a dinosaur companion that he could ride, and even sketched this out during the development of *Super Mario Bros 3*. However, the idea couldn't be satisfactorily brought to life on the aged NES, and Yoshi would eventually make his debut in the SNES launch game *Super Mario World*, hatching from an egg and making an odd sound (which is actually a repurposed orchestra hit sample). Yoshi's popularity in *Super Mario World* would lead to a couple of puzzle spin-offs for the NES, before Nintendo gave him a high-profile starring role in a SNES game.

Yoshi's Island, given the subtitle Super Mario World 2 outside of Japan, reversed the roles established in *Super Mario World*. Instead of being directed by Mario, Yoshi was in charge, tasked with reuniting the baby Mario brothers after Luigi was kidnapped by Kamek. The platform game design was much akin to that of previous Mario games, but with a twist. Although Mario still rode on Yoshi's back, the dinosaur spent his time acting as a babysitter – getting hit would separate the pair, requiring Yoshi to reclaim his infant cargo before a short timer ran down. Thankfully, Yoshi was given some new abilities in order to aid in this task. Yoshi could still grab enemies with his tongue and spit them out, but he could also swallow them and lay eggs. These eggs could be thrown as projectiles to hit enemies and were even able to rebound off walls. Additionally, Yoshi could transform into vehicles using power-ups. ▶

THE ANATOMY OF YOSHI

Our dinosaur chum has some amazing abilities thanks to his odd physiology – let's take a look...

LICKITY SPLIT

■ With his long and sticky tongue Yoshi can effortlessly snatch both enemies and items from a great distance, pulling them back into his eagerly awaiting mouth.

CHAMELEON TWIST

■ Yoshi's skin comes in many different colours, and we've seen that it can change – in fact, *Super Mario Sunshine* suggests he just needs to eat fruit to do it.

A FIERY APPETITE

■ We're not sure about the mechanics of Yoshi digestion – he can regurgitate certain enemies as fire, but can't seem to digest green shells.

RIDE ON, PARTNER

■ Is it a shell or a saddle? Takashi Tezuka has stated that it was originally a shell that became a saddle. Either way, Yoshi is an accomplished passenger carrier.

NEVER SKIPS LEG DAY

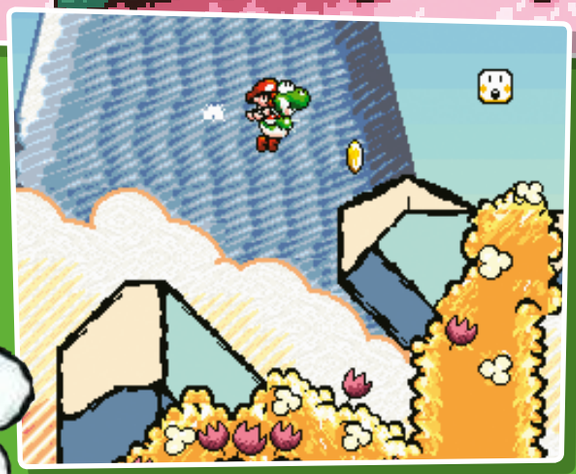
■ There's a surprising amount of power in Yoshi's legs. Not only can he jump high, he's even capable of gaining additional height by struggling against gravity itself.

OVOID MYSTERIES

■ If he eats enough, Yoshi is capable of laying eggs, which he can use as projectiles or hatch mushrooms from. Just don't think too hard about their origin.

» The Super FX2 was pressed into service to create memorable effects like this crazy psychedelic warping.

» The original *Yoshi's Island* defied the expectations of the time with a beautiful crayon-sketch aesthetic.



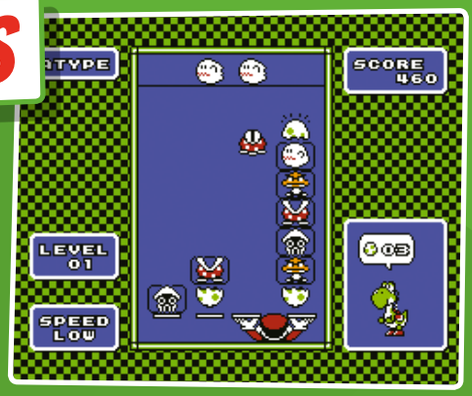
When *Yoshi's Island* was released in 1995, gamers were enamoured with new technological developments. New 3D-capable consoles were on the market, and the biggest SNES release of recent times had been *Donkey Kong Country*, which wowed players with its pre-rendered 3D graphics. *Yoshi's Island* took a strange approach to this trend, sporting a crayon-sketch aesthetic, but also utilising the Super FX2 enhancement chip to provide special effects that had never been seen on the SNES. The result was that *Yoshi's Island* had a unique and rather charming visual style.

Yoshi's Island was released to universal acclaim, and is still widely considered to be one of the greatest games of all time. In an import review for *Super Play*, Tony Mott awarded the game 94% and praised it for its variety, noting that, "You never know what's just around each corner, but you know that it'll be something worth seeing." However, he felt that the game's linear progression was disappointing by comparison to *Super Mario World*'s wealth of secret exits and stages. *Edge*'s review scored the game 9/10, crediting the Super FX2 chip with "some wonderfully inventive touches which make each new level a reward to the player." Though

» One of Yoshi's key skills is egg-throwing, with his aim being as deadly as you can make it.

YOSHI SPIN-OFFS

Yoshi's adventures aren't limited to the platform genre – check out his other starring roles...



MARIO & YOSHI

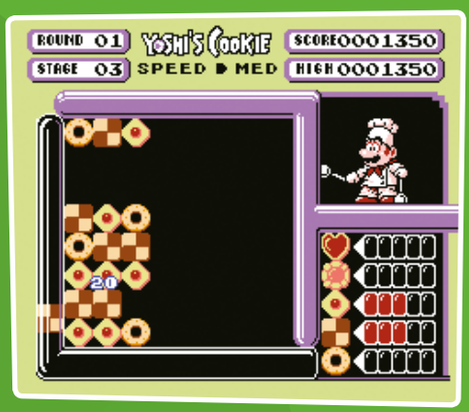
1991, NES/GAME BOY

■ Game Freak developed the first solo Yoshi game, with future *Pokémon* creator Satoshi Tajiri at the helm as director. Your goal is to manage stacks of Mario enemies, with the aim of encasing them between halves of Yoshi eggs. To be honest, this wasn't a particularly memorable or impactful debut.

YOSHI'S COOKIE

1992, SNES/NES/GAME BOY

■ The second Yoshi puzzle game is filled with sweet treats, and it's your job to rearrange them into matching clusters to make them disappear. This game was originally designed by Bullet-Proof Software under the name Hermetica, but gained the Yoshi characters and branding after Nintendo took a shine to it.



"YOSHI'S ISLAND WAS RELEASED TO UNIVERSAL ACCLAIM, AND IS STILL WIDELY CONSIDERED TO BE ONE OF THE GREATEST GAMES OF ALL TIME"

the game was released late in the life of the SNES, it was a genuine success, paving the way for further adventures. *Yoshi's Island* received a GBA conversion in 2002 and has sold over 4 million copies.

The next game in the series, titled *Yoshi's Story*, was a direct sequel to *Yoshi's Island* for the N64. Takashi Tezuka took the directorial reins for this sequel, with Miyamoto serving as producer. This time around, the Yoshis were cast into despair when Baby Bowser transformed Yoshi's Island into a pop-up storybook and made off with the Super Happy Tree. *Yoshi's Story* borrowed most of its platform design from its predecessor, though the absence of Baby Mario meant some changes were made. For a start you had a choice of six Yoshis of different colours, each with their own favourite fruit, which replenished more health if eaten. Eating fruit was important too, as you needed to eat 30 pieces to get through a level, and munching your Yoshi's favourites consecutively could greatly increase your score. *Yoshi's Story* lost the crayon-drawing look of the original, but brought in a new pre-rendered 3D look with a variety of fabric and woodgrain textures as well as elements that played off the pop-up book theme.

Yoshi's Story was released in 1998 and received a positive reception, albeit not as strongly as its predecessor. Although the game was praised for solid design and an endearing style, the main complaint was that the game lacked the innovation of *Yoshi's Island*. *Edge* felt that the game was "irrepressibly endearing" but "not the game it could and should have been," and awarded it 8/10. In *N64 Magazine*, James Ashton awarded the game 86%, commented that *Yoshi's Story* was "consciously retro" and that "while it never frustrates, irritates or disappoints, none of it comes as much of a surprise."

From here, Nintendo became willing to contract their development out to third-party developers. The first example of this approach was *Yoshi's Universal Gravitation*, or *Yoshi's Topsy-Turvy* in North America. This Game Boy Advance game was developed by Artoon, a studio formed by Sonic The Hedgehog character designer Naoto Ohshima, best known for *Blinx: The Time Sweeper*. *Yoshi's Island* was once again trapped inside a storybook, this time by a book spirit named Hongo due to the havoc being wreaked by Bowser, and only putting an end to Bowser's rampage could convince him to reverse the spell. The game's major gimmick was that it was controlled by using a tilt sensor built into the cartridge. Tilting the system would rotate the world, altering gravity to allow Yoshi to walk on walls, defeat enemies and manipulate objects.

Unfortunately, *Yoshi's Universal Gravitation* wasn't particularly well received. Although the idea of the tilt sensor was warmly welcomed, the game's short stages and the digital nature of the tilt sensing came in for criticism. *NGC Magazine*'s Martin Kitts rated the game 2/5, describing the levels as "tiny chunks of blandness" and the graphics as "remarkably ugly." *Edge* rated the game 4/10, saying that "the moments when it works are delightful" but complaining that those were "sorely outnumbered by the frustrations." The critical mauling was rounded out with a 4/10 from *games™*.

» This cannon can be directed by tilting the Game Boy Advance, firing Yoshi in one of three directions.

This didn't discourage Nintendo from experimenting with technology again. Originally conceived as a GameCube game, *Balloon Trip* was instead developed as a tech demo for the reveal of the Nintendo DS at E3 2004. Following a positive reception from show attendees, this demo was expanded and released as *Yoshi Touch & Go* (*Catch! Touch! Yoshi!* In Japan), an early game for the Nintendo DS. The game was a Nintendo EAD production, with Tezuka as producer and Hiroyuki Kimura in the directorial role. *Yoshi Touch & Go* was designed to highlight the key features of the new hardware, using its touchscreen for control and the dual screens to display a vertically oriented playfield. This was something of a reverse platform game – instead of controlling a character to negotiate a platform obstacle course, you used the screen to draw platforms in order to guide automatically moving characters out of harm's way. You could still control the firing of eggs though, and frequently needed to aim them into the upper screen in order to collect items. Baby Mario returned, frequently needing guidance as he fell through the sky, as did a 2D cartoon look.

YOSHI'S SAFARI

1993, SNES

■ This game cast you as Mario, riding around Mode 7 courses on Yoshi's back, using the Super Scope to blast enemies as you go. Branching paths and a bit of jumping spice things up, but the game failed to achieve much renown due to the Super Scope's underwhelming sales.

TETRIS ATTACK

1996, SNES/GAME BOY

■ This excellent game is a curious mash-up of three things. Released in Japan as *Panel De Pon*, Nintendo chose to swap out all the original characters for those found in *Yoshi's Island*. Then it decided to add the Tetris branding, despite the block-swapping gameplay being very different.

"THE FRIENDLY DINOSAUR'S ADVENTURES CONSTANTLY DELIVER SOME OFFBEAT AND INCREDIBLY STYLISH GRAPHICAL TECHNIQUES"

***Yoshi Touch & Go* was released in 2005 and received mostly positive reviews for its innovative approach to the platform genre, though it was criticised for its short length and lack of variety.** The game received 4/5 from *NGC*, which noted that it offered "the unique experience you can only get with DS on the one hand, but a jarringly small portion of it with the other." *Edge* was also impressed, offering the game 8/10 and noting that "it was never supposed to be a great platform game," and that it was instead "a great DS game."

Artoon resumed development duties for *Yoshi's Island DS*, which was originally revealed under the title Yoshi's Island 2. There was no mistaking it for anything other than a direct sequel, though – the art style was directly lifted from the SNES game, as was most of the game design. This time, Kamek decided not just to steal one baby, but every baby in the Mushroom Kingdom. However, some of his minions are intercepted by the stork, and two babies are left free – Mario and Peach. As the quest to rescue Baby Luigi continues, they come across Donkey Kong, and briefly team up with Baby Wario and Baby Bowser. Each of these passengers grants unique abilities to Yoshi – for example, Baby Peach's parasol gives Yoshi's flutter jump extra range, and Baby Wario's magnet can attract coins as well as move certain objects.

Thankfully, Artoon's second attempt at a Yoshi game was considerably better than its first. The sequel wasn't quite as well received as the original game, but it attracted Yoshi's most positive reviews since that first solo adventure. It received reviews of 87% from *Official Nintendo Magazine*, 85% from *NGamer* and 83% from *GamesMaster*. The game also received 8/10 from *games™*, which said that the game "retains the proven mechanics and then adds tiny touches to make the old formula even better." *Edge* wasn't quite as impressed, saying that it was a "pale imitation of a Nintendo platform game" and that "every new addition is missing that extra man-hour of effort" in a 6/10 review. *Yoshi's Island DS* sold very well when released in 2006 too, with over 2.9 million copies sold.

Despite that success, it would be many years before Yoshi would star in a new platform game. *Yoshi's New Island* was developed for the Nintendo 3DS by Arzest, a successor studio formed by key members of Artoon after the original company's parent went bust. The plot follows the events of the original *Yoshi's Island* and again sees Kamek kidnapping Baby Luigi, with Yoshi and Baby Mario being the only ones able to rescue him. The game utilised an art style that was somewhat similar to that of the previous *Yoshi's Island* games, but in a higher resolution and with 3D character models. There were also a couple of new additions in the form of the new Mega Eggdozer and Metal Eggdozer items, which could be laid after Yoshi ate giant and metal Shyguys, respectively. Both items were primarily used to smash down walls and obstacles, with the smaller metal variant primarily used while underwater.

Yoshi's New Island arrived in 2014 and received only a lukewarm critical reception. Though the game was considered to be a solid and enjoyable platformer, it was also seen to offer little of the innovation that had characterised the original game. Matthew Castle gave the game 65% in *GamesMaster*, and bemoaned the fact that the game "strips action back to its core basics with no obvious innovation of its own." *Edge* gave it 4/10, complaining that "it's a remarkable feat of engineering to take parts so beloved and construct something that feels so wrong."

» *Yoshi Touch & Go* proved to be a great way of showcasing the unique abilities of the DS.

Thankfully, fans wouldn't have to wait too long for a more exciting follow-up, as *Yoshi's Woolly World* was released for the Wii U in 2015. This platform game was developed by Good-Feel, a studio with experience of developing Nintendo platform games including *Wario Land: The Shake Dimension* and *Kirby's Epic Yarn*. As you might have gathered from the title, this game sports a hand-knitted theme, with everything from Yoshi to the scenery made of wool. This played into the game design, too – although Yoshi's move set was very similar to his classic *Yoshi's Island* abilities, he created balls of wool instead of eggs. Throwing them would allow Yoshi to patch up parts of the stage, tie up and disable enemies, and more. Better yet, the game supported Nintendo's new Amiibo toys-to-life platform, with a range of Yarn Yoshis available including a large and rather cuddly Mega Yarn Yoshi.

Reviewers clearly felt good about Good-Feel's first time in the saddle with Yoshi, because *Woolly World* was broadly well received. The underlying strength of the platform action continued to draw praise and the visual style went down a treat, but critics still felt there were too few new ideas. In *GamesMaster*, Matthew Castle's 75% review noted that, "If it wasn't for the texture, many stages would feel no more sophisticated than *Yoshi's New Island* – that game just didn't have the

» *Yoshi's New Island* had nice aestthetics, but couldn't match the fun of the original SNES game.

» *Yoshi's Woolly World* looks similar in style to *Kirby's Epic Yarn*.

» *Yoshi's Crafted World* is due in 2019 for Switch and looks to be another charming release.

artists to pull the literal wool over our eyes." *Edge*'s 6/10 review stated that "it looks sumptuous, a riot of fuzzy colour that's almost cloyingly cute at times," but that "too much of it is cut from old cloth." In *games™*, an 8/10 review claimed that the game "will put a smile on your face, if not sweat on your brow."

Despite the poor commercial performance of the Wii U, *Yoshi's Woolly World* sold 1.37 million copies. Perhaps as a result of Nintendo seeking a wider audience for a game that deserved it, the 3DS received a conversion of *Yoshi's Woolly World* in 2017, titled *Poochy & Yoshi's Woolly World* and also developed by Good-Feel. The game was well received, with reviewers noting that it retained the strong game design of the full-sized console version, though it did feature some inevitable visual downgrades. Good-Feel is also behind *Yoshi's Crafted World*, a Nintendo Switch game due for release in 2019. Continuing with the handmade look of the prior games, the main new feature is the ability to flip the viewpoint and look behind the scenery, revealing secrets. Time will tell how it is received.

Though Yoshi has had some ups and downs during his time as a solo star, his high points have been truly magical. Over two decades later, there are still very few 2D platform games that can hold a candle to *Yoshi's Island*, and the likes of *Yoshi's Island DS* and *Yoshi's Woolly World* are very good games that are well worth playing. Plus, the friendly dinosaur's adventures constantly deliver some offbeat and incredibly stylish graphical techniques, showing the level of invention that so often sets Nintendo games apart from their contemporaries. Though he might not be as prolific as Mario or even Donkey Kong, Yoshi has been firmly established as one of the Nintendo stars to keep an eye on – when a new Yoshi game comes along, it'll always be interesting. ✱

CANNED YOSHI

Dinosaurs in convenient packaging? No, just Yoshi's cancelled adventures

While most of Yoshi's games have made it to shop shelves, a couple have been lost to the mists of time. The first of these was a game that Argonaut proposed in the mid-Nineties, known as *Yoshi 3D* or *Yoshi Racing*. According to Jez San, the game was pitched as a racing game with platform elements, which starred Yoshi and looked a little like *Super Mario 64*. After a demo drew initial enthusiasm, Nintendo chose not to pick up the game, and the concept was shopped around to other publishers. Eventually, that project evolved into *Croc: Legend Of The Gobbos*.

The second unreleased Yoshi game is commonly known as *Yoshi's Story GBA*. This Game Boy Advance tech demo is a simple platform game which uses the pre-rendered graphics from *Yoshi's Story*, combined with some new graphics. Yoshi can traverse an infinitely repeating level with a set of enemies including Shy Guys, Bullet Bills and Bob-ombs. There's no way to win, but you can eventually lose a life and return to the title screen. As a tech demo, the game is mostly set up to show off the GBA's various capabilities, so there's plenty of sprite scaling and rotation on display as well as Mode 7-style effects on the title screen. It doesn't seem as if *Yoshi's Story GBA* was ever intended to be developed into a full game, but it was included as example code in the GBA development kit, and shown to journalists before the release of the handheld.

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come

INFO

- **Featured System:** GameCube
- **Year:** 2004
- **Publisher:** Nintendo
- **Developer:** Nintendo
- **Key People:** Shigefumi Hino, Masamichi Abe (directors), Hajimi Wakai (music)

GO DEEPER

- ***Pikmin*** **was originally created to target a younger Japanese female audience.**
- **Additional versions of** ***Pikmin*** **were created for the 3DS and GBA, before later being scrapped.**
- ***Pikmin 2*** **was also released on Wii as part of Nintendo's New Play Control! series.**
- **The most recent games in the series include** ***Pikmin 3*** **on Wii U and** ***Hey! Pikmin*** **for the 3DS.**

» *Pikmin 2* had an impressive amount of animations playing out simultaneously on the GameCube, and was certainly one of the console's best-looking games.

PIKMIN 2

Shigeru Miyamoto's strategy sequel course-corrected the original and is among the most unusually complex titles in Nintendo's back catalogue...

THE BACKGROUND

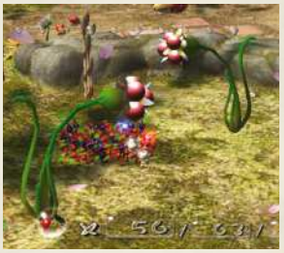
Bringing a second playable character to *Pikmin 2*, besides Olimar, was basically a decision made to challenge users with more complex strategic elements than they had in the original, demanding that they split their groups of little creatures up if they wanted to get the most from the game. The biggest decision made by the developers was removing the time limit on completing the story, and therefore organically allowing a greater focus on exploration-based elements. Nintendo was also aware that some fans weren't all that keen on the structure of the first *Pikmin* – the world of *Pikmin 2* was built to be enjoyed over a long period of time, not something to be quickly progressed through.

These elements were exacerbated by the idea of bringing in caves – dungeons in gaming parlance, of course – that froze time so players wouldn't have to be as conscious of sundown, the end point of *Pikmin*'s gameplay loop. Nintendo also isolated the action adventure elements of the experience on purpose, to provide players with a challenge that didn't allow them to pick up extra *Pikmin* along the way. Nintendo explored bringing co-op to the main game but found it restricted the design potential of the final product, so it decided on including bespoke two-player options instead. Critics agreed that the first instalment's issues were almost entirely wiped out by this richer sequel.

THE GAME

With its 30 day time limit, the original *Pikmin* released in the GameCube's launch window had an uncomfortable sense of urgency that both reduced the lifespan of the game and accidentally limited the amount of fun you felt you could have with it. In *Pikmin 2*, such an obvious

Things of note



New Play Control!

Pikmin 2 was one of a handful of GameCube titles that were ported to the Wii with motion control, which is naturally a perfect match for the strategy game.

Friends and colleagues

You get a lot less done in *Pikmin 2* by keeping Louie and Olimar together, but you do feel more secure about keeping your pikmin together comfortably.

Corporate greed

Perhaps one flaw of *Pikmin 2* is the story, where the stakes basically come down to bailing out your boss due to his financial mismanagement. Where's the sympathy there?

'Product' placement

An odd touch to *Pikmin 2* is the addition of product placement involving companies like Coca-Cola and Duracell, where players gather their merchandise as treasure.

Sound ideas

The sound design stays the right side of annoying. Remarkable really, given the amount of cutesy characters on screen – the sound effects never overdo it in bringing the planet to life.

» While not a massive seller, *Pikmin 2* was one of many titles on the GameCube that had prestige with Nintendo's hardcore.

» The series finally returns on Wii U this year, even if the formula was perfected back in 2004.

» The multiplayer element adds a satisfying additional layer to an already strategic game.

What the press thought

Cube
Score: 9.3/10
"Improving on perfection sounded impossible – it wasn't."

games™
Score: 8/10
"Takes a great game and makes it even better."

flaw was alleviated, while the addition of a second playable character in the form of Louie, Olimar's pal, allowed you greater tactical freedom in exploring the planet and facing encounters.

In many ways, *Pikmin 2* embodies the ideal sequel, a total tune-up that makes the original look like a proof of concept. This is real-time strategy via Miyamoto, with similar resource management, combat and levels of drama – all channelled through a game design that captures the complexity of the genre while absolutely making sense on a console.

The dual protagonists allowed you to accomplish more within *Pikmin*'s strict day cycle, while the addition of poison-resistant white pikmin and mega-strong purple pikmin equipped you to better counter the environmental challenges ahead. The addition of dungeon-style levels where you're stuck with the pikmin you go in with added an almost RPG-like curve to the progression of the game too, a unique combination of elements that shifted your priorities from gathering and expansion to pure survival.

And yet, there's something richer to *Pikmin 2* beyond hoarding little carrot-esque men into a colourful army, a kind of oddness that's far from random. That's the thing about Nintendo – on the surface it seems that the Japanese giant only makes cutesy games for all audiences, but moreso than any other series, *Pikmin* is utterly disturbing at times. You play, essentially, the invader into another world, a totalitarian spaceman abusing the local populace to meet your commercial demands. To help you hoard stuff to pay off your boss's debt, you permit scores of pikmin to perish based on your arbitrary whims, a truth that Nintendo is surely aware of as a giant slug rolls onto 40 red pikmin, while another 24 horrifically drown in water they're not equipped to deal with.

There's a certain nastiness to it, a creepy edge that guarantees you always learn lessons the hard way, making the most of your connection with the pikmin creatures to generate a real response from the player when they're shown to be utterly disposable. *Pikmin* is one of Nintendo's more enjoyable unusual series, and this second entry got everything right about the template, balancing the complexity of managing two characters with an increased range of powers in the form of your small friends. As gorgeous as the new, Wii U third installment is, *Pikmin 2* already took Miyamoto's series to its peak.

Why it's a future classic

Pikmin 2 is one of those rare examples of a perfect videogame sequel, isolating the strengths of the original and expanding the scope of its design in all the right ways. As one of Nintendo's more unusual series, *Pikmin 2* maintains that accessibility we expect from the company's games and mixes it with one of the most hardcore, PC-centric genres there is.

Yet *Pikmin 2* doesn't label itself a strategy game, instead using the idea that you're essentially playing as the cursor in the form of Olimar and Louie, marshalling your troops in a way that allows it to cross over into other types of games. The adventure elements of *Pikmin 2* were an effective addition, letting the almost brilliant nature of the original become something more than a finite framework for an essential game. As a franchise, *Pikmin* will no doubt keep rolling, yet there's such an ideal balance of complexity and variety in *Pikmin 2* that we're sure that this effort will remain the benchmark of the series.

SUPER METROID

Jonti Davies visits Nintendo HQ to scale the summit of the Metroid series with director Yoshio Sakamoto and discovers how the director managed to create one of the Super Nintendo's best games

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO

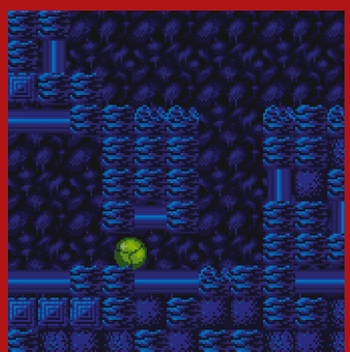
» **DEVELOPER:** R&D1/INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS

» **RELEASED:** 1994

» **GENRE:** SCI-FI ADVENTURE

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10

» Zebes was an atmospheric setting, with a variety of environments given life by the new SNES hardware.



» The iconic Morph Ball has its roots in the lo-fi NES's inability to convincingly animate a crawling Samus.

» Sakamoto also directed *Metroid Fusion* and *Zero Mission*.

Heading back up to ground level as I leave the immaculate subway at Jujo Station in the south of Kyoto, I walk through this remarkably unremarkable suburb until I see the big white block that houses Nintendo's contemporary headquarters. The gates to NCL are manned by two portly, middle-aged guards who seem to project a faintly threatening presence, which is comically undone as I notice, behind them, in the back of their little booth, a stash of NCL-manufactured toy guns apparently left over from the Seventies and a selection of Nintendo character plushes from the Famicom era. This may not be the original Nintendo HQ site, but it clearly retains the company's history like a hoarding retro gamer hangs on to loose carts.

Inside, beyond the pristine lawns and shiny entrance, I enter a marble-floored, austere world whose foyer is staffed by painfully polite and correctly spoken Nintendo officials. Eventually I'm led into a meeting room on the ground floor, where I sip the o-cha kindly provided by the demure NCL woman as I wait – and slightly nervously revise my notes and cue my Dictaphone – until a smiling, ponytailed artist type arrives and immediately makes his introduction. This is Yoshio Sakamoto, producer of *Super Metroid* back in the early Nineties and still an integral Nintendo developer today. "Hajimemashite. Yoroshiku onegai shimasu."

Sakamoto has brought with him a small booklet containing an overview of *Super Metroid* to aid his memory – the game was completed 24 years ago, but the *Metroid* legacy stretches back two decades – as we chat.

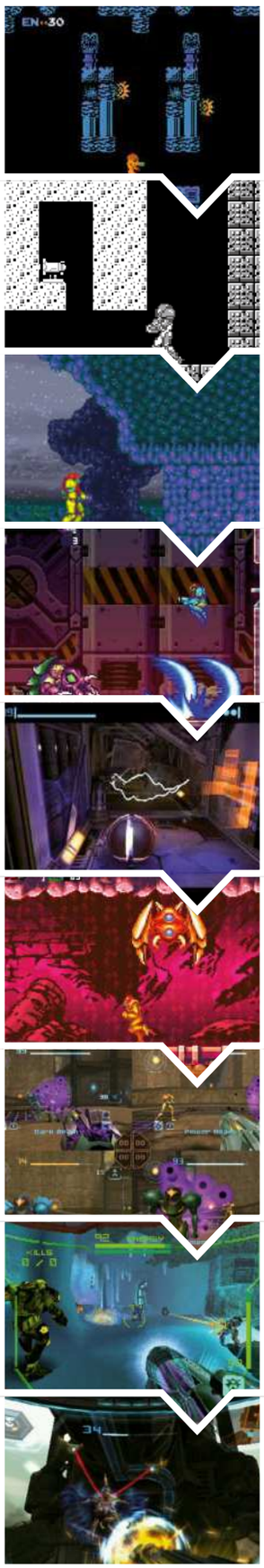
"To start with, there was the Famicom *Metroid* game," he recalls. Sakamoto worked on that first *Metroid* adventure, and its relevance to *Super Metroid* is particularly important because of the unchanging core concept of the 2D *Metroid* games; a core that was formed in said Famicom Disk System original of 1986.

"My boss [producer Makoto Kanoh] told me that *Metroid* was really popular in North America, so he encouraged me to produce a new *Metroid* game with the high-quality graphics that were becoming possible thanks to the Super Famicom. Of course I said, 'Yes, I'd like to try doing that.' The game design and concept had already been established before *Metroid II* was produced for the Game Boy," Sakamoto explains. "When it came to making another sequel, this time for the Super Famicom, we really wanted to see how far we could push the SFC to generate greater power of expression and enhance the appearance of the game world, all while working with a basically unchanged concept. That was our initial motivation as far as *Super Metroid* was concerned: to build on the expressiveness of *Metroid II* and achieve greater presence, something closer to a reality."

Sakamoto had nothing to do with the development of *Metroid II* – at the time his services were required elsewhere within NCL – yet that sophomore title in part shaped the plan for *Super Metroid*: "As the last scene depicted Baby Metroid being born right in front of Samus's eyes… well… there's no real explanation for that in the course of the games, but that scene was another source of incentive for us in that we wanted to follow on from that ending, linking *Metroid II* with *Super Metroid*. We were determined to keep the same world-view and maintain the continuity of the story."

Aside from the basic formula of play that was set in motion by *Metroid*,

Key games



Metroid
(FDS/NES/GBA – 1986)

The *Metroid* series was born on disk, not cartridge. It began life as this 1986-vintage Famicom Disk System title before migrating to the silicon of NES carts for consumption in the West. Videogames' first internationally famous heroine was born here. (An emulated version can be found in the GameCube release of *Metroid Prime*.)

Metroid II: Return Of Samus
(Game Boy – 1992)

This monochrome curio transported Samus to the Metroid homeworld of SR388, its dramatic finale providing Sakamoto and team with a bridge into the events of *Super Metroid*. The game was updated in 2017 by MercurySteam for the 3DS as *Metroid: Samus Returns*. It's a slick remake with new mechanics and neat 3D effects.

Super Metroid
(SNES – 1994)

Arguably the finest game in the *Metroid* series, this 16-bit creation brought 2D adventure gaming to a new level of sophistication. *Super Metroid*'s pacing and world design are by all measures perfect, and there are so many aspects to explore here that the game retains its unique allure 24 years on.

Metroid Fusion
(GBA – 2002)

Taking the *Super Metroid* template into the 21st Century, and again with Yoshio Sakamoto at the creative helm, *Metroid Fusion* found Samus once more facing the destruction of a game world. Only this time Samus was the knowing perpetrator.

Metroid Prime
(GameCube – 2002)

Retro Studios' first-person adventure spin on the *Metroid* template sold 1.5 million copies in the United States alone, yet it simultaneously pushed Samus Aran away from Japanese sensibilities, guaranteeing a future of Western success at the cost of *Metroid*'s Japanese heritage. *Prime*'s unusual perspective and restrained style of first-person play carved out a niche for Samus in the next generation, cleverly sidestepping the FPS genre to find new ground.

Metroid: Zero Mission
(GBA – 2004)

Zero Mission's retelling of the first *Metroid* game brought with it a *Fusion*-standard graphical upgrade. By this stage Samus's popularity in her homeland was at an all-time low, and sales didn't reach six figures in Japan; a shame, as *Zero Mission* was even better than the FDS original.

Metroid Prime 2: Echoes
(GameCube – 2004)

The first *Metroid* game to feature a multiplayer mode, although its inclusion was perhaps ill-advised, as it failed to really add anything of worth to the traditional single-player adventure. *Echoes*' greatest successes were in translating more of Samus's abilities to a 3D context.

Metroid Prime: Hunters
(DS – 2006)

Developed by NST, the outfit behind titles such as *Ridge Racer 64* and *Wave Race: Blue Storm*, *Hunters* was one of the better first-person DS games, with a multiplayer mode that felt more natural than that of *Echoes*. However, compared with joypad-controlled *Metroid* predecessors, *Hunters*' touch-screen controls resulted in a slightly lower-than-average level of overall satisfaction.

Metroid Prime 3: Corruption
(Wii – 2007)

The final release in the *Prime* trilogy effectively brought the modern *Metroid* experience closer in line with the FPS genre, combining Remote-directed shooting and relentless action.

» *Super Metroid* brought with it *Metroid II*'s battery saves, a godsend after the first game's password system.

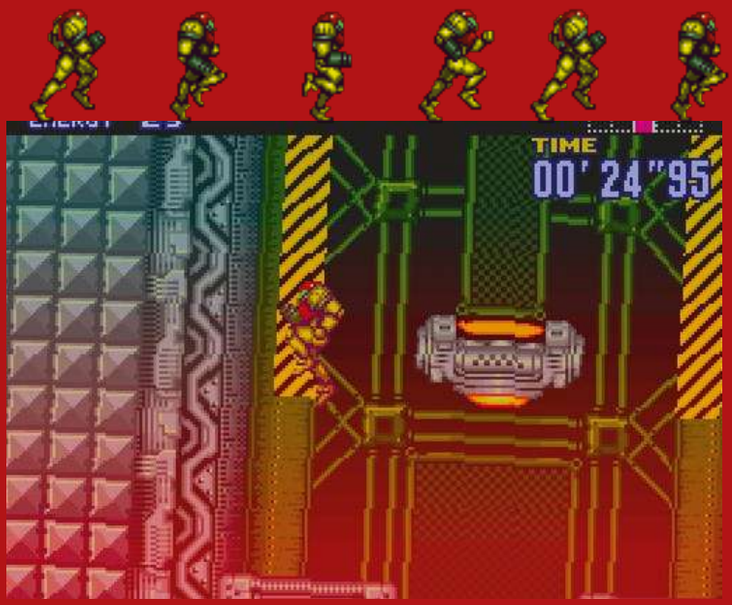
the code on that million-selling disk also plotted the aesthetic direction of the series. I suggest to Sakamoto-san that *Super Metroid* and the *Metroid* games in general don't look like 'typical' NCL games and I ask him why that might be. He sips his tea and then replies: "I think the film *Alien* had a huge influence on the production of the first *Metroid* game. All of the team members were affected by HR Giger's design work, and I think they were aware that such designs would be a good match for the *Metroid* world we had already put in place. To be honest, I've never really been clear on what is or isn't the 'Nintendo look', but as far as we were concerned, we were just projecting another image from within Nintendo – another face of Nintendo, if you like. But yes, it's a science-fiction game, so…"

Other than the artistic influence of Necronom, Sakamoto reckons that numerous games affected the style of *Super Metroid* – "I can't list them… There are just too many of them" – although he counters this by highlighting the experimental side of his team's early work: "For the prototype stage of *Super Metroid*'s development we just had a few Intelligent Systems programming staff, myself, and another [in-house] Nintendo designer. We examined what was possible in the game, and as the core *Metroid* system was already in place we considered how we could make the game easier to play, what new ideas we could incorporate, and so on… Then we drafted in lots of other NCL and IntSys developers once we got beyond that stage and into the proper work."

There has always been a complex yet mutually beneficial relationship between Nintendo, then based in Higashiyama (to the northeast of the current Minami location), and Intelligent Systems, constantly situated in the eastern Kyoto ward of Higashiyama. Sakamoto refers to the team as "IntSys" and says that it had been helping Nintendo with the *Metroid* series since the initial FDS game, "as a second-party developer". While it's fair to say that the game design and play-testing abilities of NCL's in-house staff have always been some of the world's best, Intelligent Systems' developers were on hand to provide indispensable technical know-how, particularly focused on the hardware side of things.

"IntSys has always been very capable with hardware," Sakamoto adds, "so during the experimental stage we told the IntSys programmers what kinds of things we wanted to do and verified what in reality could be done. We'd been well prepared for the move to the Super Famicom hardware, so we had some idea of what to expect before we went into it; which features we should use, and how. I think it was good that we went through the prototype stage because it gave us a base onto which the post-

"The nap room wasn't being cleaned at all. One morning staff woke us up and told us that the room smelled like a zoo"

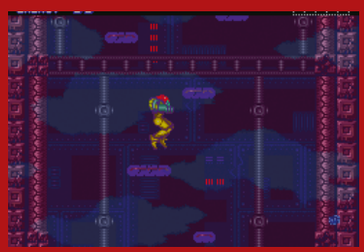


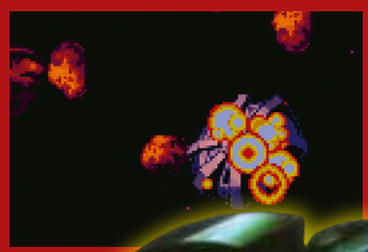
» The open-ended gameplay meant that *Super Metroid* has become popular for speed runs.

experimental stage staffers could easily begin their work. At the time, the SFC was reputed to be difficult to develop for. Depending on how you partitioned the Super Famicom's video RAM, which looked after the sorting of image information, the scope of possibilities would change wildly. Knowing that you could diminish the VRAM's potential by poor partitioning was useful information, because it meant we could think about how certain things could or couldn't be achieved, and how we could work around those limitations. As we were migrating from the Famicom to Super Famicom, really everyone – not just Nintendo but other developers too – seemed to be having fun testing the feature set of the new hardware. That went for us, too: I remember often thinking, 'Oh, I had no idea we could even do this!' The graphics and sound were fantastic, but we were still driven by wanting to [not] be outdone by the arcade games of the time."

To a man, the developers supplied by IntSys to work on *Super Metroid* were all programmers. In spite of the various backgrounds of the *Super Metroid* team, there was apparently no NCL-IntSys rivalry; no factions, just harmony and productive co-operation. Key team members from the Nintendo side included Makoto Kanoh, the producer, the guy who instigated the project; my interviewee, Yoshio Sakamoto, who was the director in charge of game design; and Tomomi Yamane, who was the figure Sakamoto regards as having been the 'main' designer: "He was very skilled and was particularly interested in the hardware stuff, consulting with the IntSys people as to what kind of images could be displayed."

Even though the team's objective was to build on the success of





» *Super Metroid* used the full range of special effects available to the SNES for its bosses and environments.

Metroid and *Metroid II*, only three of the original *Metroid* team, including Sakamoto himself, worked on *Super Metroid*: "The rest of the [NCL side] was made up of young trainee developers," he recalls. "Of course young people can be quite impertinent – and those on the *Super Metroid* team certainly were – but I think that's quite important in a way. These young people had enough about them to help us a lot. There were many different personalities in the *Super Metroid* team, which was a good thing. It was a harsh development environment, so I'm sure that some of the staff didn't enjoy the work, but generally the team was full of the 'Let's go for it!' spirit. I think that was partly because of the timing as well, what with the Super Famicom pushing everything to the next level."

The "next level" wasn't merely the notion of advanced graphics and sound: it was also a matter of the expansion and improvement of level design. However, Sakamoto and team were reluctant to drag *Super Metroid* into the realm of storytelling methods utilised by RPGs and other adventure games. "We really didn't want to explain things to the player using too many words," Sakamoto states. "We just wanted to let them play and be able to work things out for themselves. For example, say there's a mechanism where you need to climb up a ladder and place a bomb there in order to advance, as one component in the solution of a [gameplay] riddle; if that was all you needed to do in order to get through to the next area, you'd miss all of the other mechanisms we'd put in place and wouldn't even realise that certain parts of the game existed. We wanted players to explore everything we'd made and then move on. That's why we designed the maps in such a way that the player couldn't escape without exploration, or in such a way that the player would end up back at a starting point before advancing. The player would be cornered/driven and would eventually be forced to stop and say, 'Right, how should I think about this area?' That's the essential point of *Super Metroid*'s map design. Not using words meant that the player had to 'feel' his/her

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DONKEY KONG JR
SYSTEM: ARCADE, FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM/NES, ETC
YEAR: 1982

KID ICARUS (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: FDS/NES, GBA
YEAR: 1986

METROID
SYSTEM: FDS/NES, GBA
YEAR: 1986

way through the game – and that's how we wanted it to be. When they discovered something new – a new item or new location – we wanted the player to feel that he/she had made that discovery independently, without help from the game."

R&D1 went to great pains to achieve the fine balance seen in *Super Metroid*'s item locations, puzzles, boss encounters, and in Samus's acquired abilities and inventory use. It wasn't simply the case that everything fell into position at the first attempt at design either, as Sakamoto reveals: "In a stage following on from an area where the player made lots of discoveries, we'd hold back from pushing the player too far in order to avoid repetition. Balance between difficulty level and player discoveries was crucial. We wanted to avoid creating an on-rails experience – we wanted the player to feel free. But it was incredibly difficult to get that balancing act right. We'd been designing levels in this way since the first game, so we had a lot of experience but we still needed to experiment and build and rebuild."

As well as being a *Metroid* debut for most of the team, *Super Metroid* marked the Super Famicom debut for all concerned. Naturally, this step up presented some hurdles that even the advice of IntSys couldn't equip the team to surmount. "One problem with the shift to the Super Famicom," Sakamoto says, "was that it meant we suddenly needed a lot more sprites and artwork, so we shared the map and enemy design responsibilities throughout the team, with everyone making some input in those areas. But then doing that resulted in a complete mishmash of styles because of each designer's individual preference, so in the end I had to ask Yamane to retouch everything that had been submitted, bringing it all together as one consistent design."

Remarkably, there was no friction within the team even during the frenzied last stage of development, although there was something of a bad smell: "During the final six months of development I didn't know where I lived any more; the Nintendo building – not here, but the old place [in Higashiyama] – became like a boarding house for the *Super Metroid* team," Sakamoto grins. "It got to the stage where I really don't remember going home at all! There was a nap room where it was okay to sleep, but sometimes it was full [of sleeping, overworked *Super Metroid* staff] – those were the worst times, when I wanted to sleep but couldn't, and I didn't have time to go home!

> **"We didn't want to explain things to the player. We wanted to let them be able to work things out for themselves"**

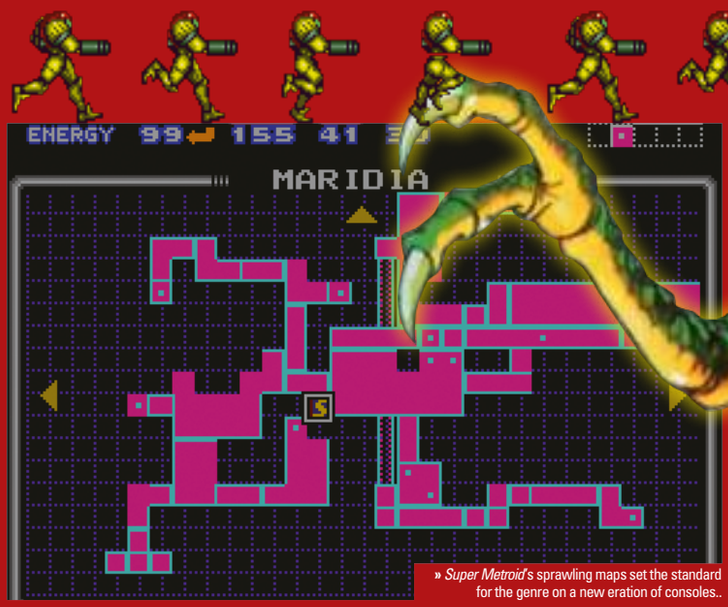
There were always between ten and fifteen of us in the office through the night, so we had to take naps in turns. The nap room wasn't being cleaned or looked after at all, because we were always using it; one morning staff from another area came to wake us up and told us that the room smelled like a zoo. Another Nintendo employee put a room freshener in the nap room, but that only made the place pong even worse. Everyone in Nintendo gave us funny looks," Sakamoto laughs. "It's quite sad having only these kinds of memories!"

Our talk soon takes a turn from development room stench to the wrath of a Nintendo demigod: Gunpei Yokoi. In his early 50s at the time of *Super Metroid*'s production, Yokoi was the game's general project manager but did not exercise any hands-on control. Sakamoto remembers how his superior viewed *Super Metroid*: "Yokoi-san, who at the time was my section chief and who always had fresh ideas, was always angry when he saw us all completely absorbed and working crazy overtime on *Super Metroid*. He came in and said, 'Are you lot trying to produce a work of art or something?' [Laughs] But this was an epic and we were already way past our deadline, and it seemed we were getting progressively further from our objectives – Yokoi-san was becoming angrier with us day by day during that period. We weren't aware of it, but Kanoh was given a warning by Yokoi-san. Although he was really unhappy with us, and even though he wasn't the type to dish out praise, Yokoi-san was constantly playing *Super Metroid* once we'd finished it – he was hooked. He was playing it so much that I wondered what he was up to. [Laughs] When other developers brought their action games to Nintendo, he'd always compare them with *Super Metroid* and invariably ended up recommending the third-party developer to 'go away and play *Super Metroid*'. That's how fond he was of our game. I suppose this is a better memory than the smelly nap room anecdote," Sakamoto laughs.

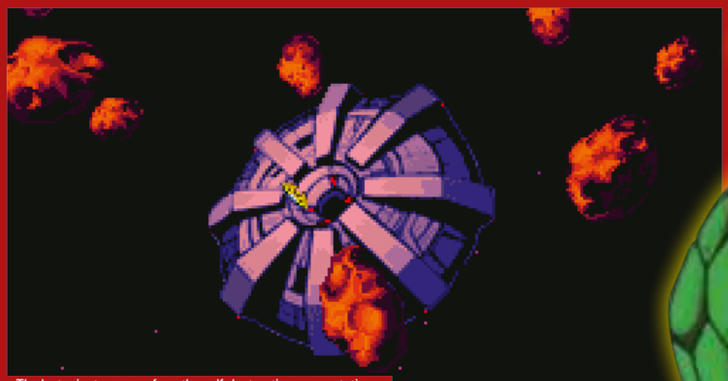
"*Super Metroid* was released in '94," he continues, "and development had taken us between two and three years. I don't know how it was perceived throughout the company, but the timing was such that all teams were focused on putting out lots of new SFC games, so there was obviously some expectation that we deliver with *Super Metroid*. We definitely had a lot of support and understanding of the game's concept from people related with the project, and that helped to ensure that we did a good job." Which, as everyone who has played the game will quickly attest, is a monumental understatement. And if it was good enough for Gunpei Yokoi, it's certainly good enough for us. ★

24 megabits, 7 modes

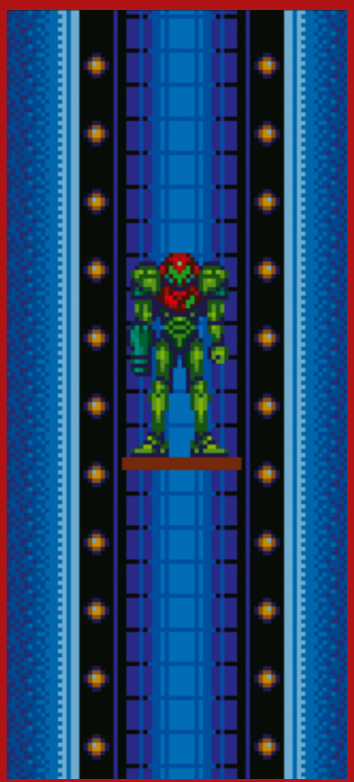
"We used all seven of the hardware modes available," Sakamoto tells me, although he doesn't explain precisely what that means. And how did you use the 24-meg cartridge that ended up housing *Super Metroid*, I ask? "I can't remember!" Sakamoto laughs. There's a pause. "We achieved wonderful graphics and sound by dedicating most of the memory to those features. Yes. Oh, and the game's maps were also quite large, I think. We made good, balanced use of the 24 megabits, anyway – that much I know for sure."



» *Super Metroid*'s sprawling maps set the standard for the genre on a new eration of consoles..



» The last-minute escape from the self-destructing space station has become a familiar opening for *Metroid* games.



» The way in which new abilities open up new areas has been often copied since *Super Metroid*'s release.

The big bosses

Kraid
This first major boss character is literally a monster: he probably missed out on a role in the Chewits adverts purely because he was overqualified. Kraid's weak point is his gob, although he uses his whole being to launch quasi-organic thorns and fireballs in Samus' direction.

Phantoon
A good example of the Super Famicom hardware's transparency effects, Phantoon at times appears to be an apparition; this boss's trick is to flit between protected translucency and a devastatingly powerful solid state, and he likes to launch endless rounds of flaming blue orbs.

Draygon
This yellow-bellied, oversized crustacean is more than just a simple typo. Draygon is a mean swimmer, and its weak points are protected by the shell of a giant lobster. Slightly perversely, *Super Metroid* encourages you to vanquish Draygon by electrocuting it until its flesh turns purple.

Ridley
An homage – in name alone, obviously – to *Alien* director Ridley Scott, whose film was a major inspiration to the series, this senior Space Pirate appears once at the start of *Super Metroid* and again, in more powerful – yet paradoxically more vulnerable – form, towards the end of the game.

Mother Brain
The enigmatic final boss of *Super Metroid* is essentially a lump of deskulled brain. However, Mother Brain protects itself with dynamic weapons and the glass casing of a robo-suit, and when that fails, it connects to the neck of a bio-mechanical bodysuit. Afterwards, Samus again has to run for her life.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Lylat Wars

» **PLATFORM:** N64 » **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO » **RELEASED:** 1997

The most iconic part of *Lylat Wars* outside of its main cast of anthropomorphic sci-fi heroes is surely the bizarre, but brilliant idea that the last boss is a floating gorilla head.

The final scrap with Andross, which is certainly a step up in difficulty from any of the preceding levels, varies depending on which of the game's two branching narrative routes you take – the more difficult one ends with Andross transforming into his true form, a disgusting giant brain, and climaxes with you performing a daring *Return Of The Jedi*-style escape from danger.

But all routes end with an assault on this giant gorilla head, which is animated so expressively, and the scale of which is so impressive, even relative to the other gigantic boss battles earlier in *Lylat Wars*. It was a brilliantly surprising reward for your efforts that tonally matched the climax of *Star Fox* on SNES but made the most of the possibilities granted by the N64's 3D technology.

BIO

Known as *Star Fox 64* everywhere else but Europe – apparently due to a possible copyright dispute over the name 'StarVox' in Germany – according to developer Dylan Cuthbert, this sequel to *Star Fox* on SNES had a weird journey to completion. You probably know the story of *Star Fox 2*, the scrapped SNES sequel, which debuted the multi-route structure that eventually surfaced in *Lylat Wars* – some of the content made it into this N64 title, but the majority of *Star Fox 64* was original. Being skilful allowed the player to unlock new paths through the story; an undoubtedly forward-thinking idea in an energetic arcade shooter.

MORE CLASSIC LYLAT WARS MOMENTS

Another path

Lylat Wars leaves it to you to discover the different routes through levels offered by the story, and the first time that happens to you is pretty damn exciting – circumnavigating a few tight cliffs leads Falco to take you through a waterfall and fight a completely different end boss. This is when *Lylat Wars* starts to branch, letting players gradually peel off each strand of its vast galaxy.

Starwolf showdown

Players face Starwolf no matter which path they take. It's in this encounter, however, on the Death Star-like surface space station environment of Bolse, that *Lylat Wars* feels the most like a *Star Wars* movie. With surface cannons sending laser fire everywhere and swarms of enemy fighters, it's essentially structured like the Death Star battle: take out your rivals, blow the core and we'll go home.

Ground assault

A pleasing departure from Arwing-related combat is the opportunity to drive a landmaster during the Macbeth and Titania levels, putting you on ground level for some variety in combat dynamics as this moving armoured train throws boulders at you. Of course, Peppy and company still fly by Arwing, being the cowards they are (and it would be complicated to program ground AI for all four characters).

Solar

Level design is amazing in *Lylat Wars* – it's easily one of the most enjoyable space shooters outside of LucasArts' back-catalogue, with each level using the mechanics in a different way. In Solar, that's taken further by the fact your Arwing is constantly running down in health as you progress through this hot planet, meaning that you have to keep killing enemies or destroying rocks to survive.

NINTENDO'S 3D GAME-CHANGER

In an age when it was said that 3D platform games didn't work, Nintendo proved us all wrong. Nick Thorpe and Luke Albigés examine the impact of the N64's most revolutionary game...

Nintendo has always been a company that has set its own agenda, and that has rarely been more apparent than it was with the N64. Rather than following the likes of 3DO, Sega and Sony into the CD-ROM market, it stuck doggedly to cartridges. Instead of simply evolving the SNES pad, it produced a radical three-pronged controller design. Neither of those design choices proved to be the future – it's a tall order to convince an entire industry to do things differently, after all. The thing that made people take note was *Super Mario 64*, though – a bold and unique design, just like the machine it ran on. However, unlike its host hardware, it made a profound impact on the rest of the industry, shaping the development of future platform games and 3D games in general for years to come.

Of course, *Super Mario 64* had to be a bold design. The one common feature of 3D platform games released before *Super Mario 64* is that they were all distinct creations, as no two developers had the same vision of how to adapt the genre to the polygonal revolution. Exact gave us *Jumping Flash!*, a game which offered free-roaming stages, viewed from a first-person perspective. Realtime Associates delivered *Bug!*, which featured 3D stages comprised of interlocking straight paths, thus strictly regulating player movement. Xing's *Floating Runner* utilised free-roaming stages but employed a fixed perspective that made it feel almost like a top-down 2D game. Even if Nintendo had wanted to follow convention with Mario's 3D debut, there was simply no convention to follow.

The other reason that it had to be a groundbreaking game was the weight of expectation placed upon it at the time. "Up until *Mario 64*, and probably until *Mario Galaxy*, there has always been expectation surrounding a new Nintendo console and with it a new *Mario*," says Paul Davies, who was the editor of *Computer & Video Games* during the development and release of *Super Mario 64*. "So, even though we had no idea how this would shape up, the prospect of *Ultra 64 Mario* was enough to affect your breathing for a while."

Even those close to Nintendo weren't aware of what was in the works. "I was working for Software Creations at the time and they were part of the original 'Dream Team' of developers working on N64," recalls John Pickford. "I was lucky enough to be part of a group to visit the Shoshinkai 1995 show in Tokyo for the first unveiling of the Ultra 64 and its software. When we landed at the airport I remember bumping into several other British developers including the Stampers from Rare and David Jones from DMA design. David said something along the lines of, 'I hear *Mario* is looking very good.' That was the first time I had heard there was a *Mario* game in development. There had been zero publicity or even mention of *Mario* until that point."

» Later levels typically featured more floating islands, and consequently greater risk of death by plummeting.

» John Pickford was one of the early 'Dream Team' developers for the N64 and had an early glimpse of *Mario 64*.

DOFFING THE CAP

A Hat In Time director Jonas Kaerlev on how Super Mario 64 inspired and influenced his crowdfunded 3D platformer

When did you first encounter *Super Mario 64*, and what impression did you get from it?
I experienced *Super Mario 64* for the first time in the late Nineties. It was the first game I played that was fully 3D, so it was really impressive at the time.

I wasn't great at English back then, since I'm not a native English speaker, so a lot of the dialogue got lost on me, but that didn't stop me from getting all 120 Stars. The presentation made it easy to fill in the gaps and imagine what the characters were saying. If I didn't know what to do because the dialogue was the only guide, I'd just explore the level until I found out what was going on – this sparked my interest in games that provide an interesting world to explore.

What were your favourite parts of *Super Mario 64*?
There are so many good parts! I think everyone remembers the piano in Big Boo's Haunt, the vertical climb up Whomp's Fortress, and plotting vengeance against the bird who took your hat in Shifting Sand Land. Peach's Castle is also one of the best parts of *Super Mario 64* – it feels so mysterious, almost like a full level in and of itself.

Which 3D platform games do you think were the best successors to *Super Mario 64*?
Super Mario Sunshine is definitely one of the best, and it's a *literal* successor to *Super Mario 64*. It stays true to the formula that *Mario 64* created, but adds more flavour to the world, making it all seem like a real, connected place. I like how the levels transform over time. It's so cool to watch Delfino Plaza get flooded with water when Corona Mountain erupts.

Psychonauts by DoubleFine is also a really great spiritual successor! It's a bit more story-based, and the levels are amazing, especially Whispering Rock and The Milkman Conspiracy. *Psychonauts* even did *Super Mario Galaxy* gravity before that was a thing!

Which elements of *Super Mario 64* have you drawn inspiration from for A Hat In Time?
Similar to *Super Mario 64*, every mission in A *Hat In Time* is centred on a Time Piece the player has to collect. A lot of the levels undergo massive changes for every new mission, to make the level feel fresh on every visit.

At first, you might be defeating the Mafia Of Cooks to collect your Time Piece, and next you're a detective in the mission 'Murder On The Owl Express'. Every new mission has a story, and you'll get to understand more about the levels and characters on every visit.

As a developer of 3D platform games, how do you seek to differentiate *A Hat In Time* from genre-defining games like *Super Mario 64*?
A Hat In Time takes a different approach to both gameplay and story. For gameplay, the player's moveset is completely different, using a double-jump and an air boost to navigate both horizontal and vertical space. The player can also change and upgrade the moveset by collecting badges and putting them on their hat. This way, we reward players for exploring with features that enrich their experience. For story, every level in *A Hat in Time* is called a Chapter. Every Chapter focuses on a single location, be it Mafia Town, Subcon Forest, or the Owl Express train. Additionally, every Chapter introduces a new cast of characters, and these characters stick with you for the entire Chapter, until you reach the Chapter finale, where things go off the rails! In Subcon Forest, you'll be signing your soul away in contracts to The Snatcher, and on the Owl Express, you'll have to choose whether the angry Conductor or the smooth DJ Grooves is your friend, or your foe.

A Hat in Time also supports multiplayer, both local and online. We took inspiration from a *Mario 64* hack, and saw a lot of potential to fully realise multiplayer for *A Hat in Time*. You can defeat bosses, collect Time Pieces and have a good time your friends.

Lastly, *A Hat in Time* has modding support. Players can create their own worlds and missions. We've seen the amazing things people can make in their favourite games, so we want to embrace that fully. The levels can be either simple to design or they can be giant worlds with multiple missions. All these features feel like a natural evolution of *Mario 64*, and we hope everyone will be enjoying *A Hat in Time* when it comes to Windows and Mac in 2017.

Placards at Shoshinkai said that the game was 50 per cent complete, and even described *Super Mario 64* as a temporary title, but that wasn't the impression that attendees took away from the event. On a visual level alone, Nintendo had already produced something stunning. "The game was shown on the show floor – looking finished and playable," says John. "And like nothing else I'd ever seen." Paul was also attending the show, and the game made a similar impression on him. "It sounds incredibly corny, but I couldn't believe my eyes. I was gobsmacked, bowled over."

That initial showing elicited strong emotional reactions from all who saw it. "I was so excited, I tried to impress the hotel staff with my bagful of press materials and transparencies," Paul confesses. "They were not impressed." According to John, other people were feeling something closer to fear, or at the least denial. "I don't know if it's true but I heard a rumour that 'Sony execs' were going around telling people that the game was running on hidden 'workstations'," he recalls. "Hard to believe now but a lot of the technical elements (MIP mapping, filtering, perspective-correct textures, z-buffering, hardware anti-aliasing) were all new to consoles and not present on PlayStation."

The version of *Super Mario 64* shown at Shoshinkai in November 1995 might not look immediately recognisable to fans – even the familiar entrance hall of the castle is different, lacking the cloud murals and even the central staircase seen in the final game – but that incredible visual polish carried over to the finished game because there was no fabrication or trickery involved. The N64 was perfectly capable of all of those features, and gave *Super Mario 64*'s worlds and characters a feeling of solidity that immediately placed both the game and console ahead of the competition.

"Everything just worked so incredibly slickly," says Andrew Oliver, then running *Glover* developer

» For the first time ever, Mario could dangle from ledges and pull himself up after a close jump.

» Chris Sutherland was responsible for *Banjo-Kazooie* and most recently worked on *Yooka-Laylee*.

» Unlike the main stages, boss stages were typically linear affairs with little freedom to explore.

> **"This set the benchmark – anyone releasing a 3D platformer thereafter on N64 was going to be compared with Mario by players!"**
> Chris Sutherland

Interactive Studios. "In the 'other camp', we'd been amazed by PlayStation's 3D capabilities. But, whilst Sony pushed all developers to make 3D games, many of us struggled with certain aspects. Cameras were shaky, 3D meshes showed cracks, textures warped and getting a third-person character to feel really nice and for the camera to track it well always seemed just out of reach." Nintendo's game exhibited none of those problems. "*Mario 64* was so professional, no shake, no shudder, or warping or cracking textures. The PlayStation was 32-bit with integer maths and the N64 was 64-bit with floating point maths, so there was good reason it worked so much better."

Mark R Jones, a former artist for Ocean, was similarly taken aback by the leap in 3D quality. "The graphics were jaw-dropping. I'd only really played a few 3D games on the PlayStation and this was a massive improvement," he remembers. "Round things looked round and not like a series of joined up straight lines. The colours were bright and vibrant and, despite many games claiming that playing them was 'like controlling a cartoon', I think that with this game it had really and finally happened for real. I remember everyone at school saying that *Knight Lore* on the Spectrum was like a cartoon back in 1984. But really it wasn't. *Mario* was the real thing. It had actually happened."

The press immediately set the hype train in motion. New images would appear in magazines every month, whipping anticipation up to fever pitch – but it wasn't just the public that was excited. Even developers couldn't wait to get their hands on the game. "Being a fan of the 2D *Mario* series I was fascinated by how they'd brought *Mario* into 3D, what problems they'd encountered and the approaches they took to tackling them," says Chris Sutherland of Playtonic Games. At Rare, then a Nintendo subsidiary, he served as the lead programmer on *Banjo-Kazooie*. "One might have expected the transition to 3D to have been gradual, e.g. Nintendo could have taken a traditional 2D *Mario* course and given it hints of 3D (similar to the *Donkey Kong Country Returns*) but instead they jumped in head first to give the player an immersive world to explore," he continues. "This set the benchmark – anyone releasing a 3D platformer thereafter on N64 was going to be compared with *Mario* by players!"

» These rolling balls rolled realistically around banked curves, producing lateral movement that could trip unwary players up.

» Level design was supremely clever – Wet-Dry World required manipulation of water levels to achieve your goals.

Word got around the *Killer Instinct* barn that the new *Mario* game was in the building so we all piled into Chris Tilston's room for a gander," recalls Chris Seavor, another former Rare developer who led the development of *Conker's Bad Fur Day*. "I think this was a little bit before it actually released and it was the Japanese version, so nobody could understand any of the text. Needless to say it was pretty mind-blowing. I'd never seen anything like it before. Then Tim [Stamper] turned up looking rather mortified that we were all seeing this 'super secret' thing and took it away… Still, I'll never forget that moment."

Andrew's first experience with the game was equally memorable. "It was the summer of 1996 at the relatively-new E3 show in Los Angeles – Nintendo had a huge stand with around 30 N64s set up and dedicated to *Mario 64* and people queuing three deep to take turns. Most were running around outside the castle – just enjoying the experience of running Mario around a beautiful cartoon fantasy world. They nailed the feel good controls of a character running around a 3D world. Everyone was beaming – it was a turning point for the industry."

The importance of solid controls to *Super Mario 64* can't be overstated. "It was the first time I had played a game where messing around with the character's abilities was a lot of fun even with nothing specific ▶

DIFFERENT STROKES

Mario's 3D debut was so good it launched the DS, too. But the DS version was no lazy port – it was a remake with new features...

MORE CHARACTERS

■ In addition to Mario, three extra characters – Yoshi, Wario and Luigi – were made playable, each with slight differences. Luigi's jumps are higher at the cost of handling, for instance, while Yoshi gets a unique hybrid of his *Yoshi's Island* move set and the original *Super Mario 64* one. Collecting caps mid-level lets you switch between them.

NEW ABILITIES

■ Classic *Mario 64* power-ups like the Wing Cap, Vanish Cap and Metal Cap are split among each of the characters, while new powers include mushrooms that can boost character size and damage (like the Mega Mushrooms seen later in the series) and a fire breath move for Yoshi. Several Power Stars are tied to the character-specific abilities.

EXTRA STARS

■ There are 37 additional Power Stars in the DS version, although several original ones were altered or removed for a grand total of 150. Many of the new ones are Switch Stars (which triggered by a switch and must be collected before they vanish). Collecting every Star still allows access to the castle roof via the cannon in the grounds, although Yoshi is no longer there as he's now playable.

» Rare's Gregg Mayles was the designer for both *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Banjo-Tooie*.

MULTIPLAYER & MINIGAMES

■ VS Mode lets up to four players face off in arenas in an attempt to grab as many Stars and Coins as possible within a time limit. There are also unlockable minigames, which can be earned by catching rabbits in the main game. These are largely simple distractions, all of which are designed to showcase various uses for the handheld's touchscreen.

CONTROL OPTIONS

■ Given that the DS didn't have an analogue stick, Nintendo had to get creative with its input methods here. One option is to use digital control with an extra run button, although this lacks precision. The other uses the touchscreen as a virtual analogue stick and, while tricky to get used to, this is the best of the two options once you manage to adjust to it.

IMPROVED GRAPHICS

■ A combination of decent processing power and a smaller screen means that many aspects of the graphics see a marked improvement on DS – Bowser's model in particular is more in line with his modern look, while there are plenty of notable changes (most for the better) over the course of the game. The second screen is also used to display an overhead course map.

» Jumping over waves of ice is just one of the challenges in Snow Man's Land.

to do," says Gregg Mayles, a Rare developer and *Banjo-Kazooie*'s designer. "It has still not been beaten, in my honest opinion," Chris Seavor adds. "Slick, tight, great animation and totally intuitive. The first attempt at such a control type and they nailed it for the ages." In fact, he found that even the difficult aspects of controlling the portly plumber provided satisfaction. "There was a particular mechanic that took me ages to get to grips with, which involved jumping off a wall, I just couldn't do it. Then one day all my muscles suddenly twigged, and the sheer joy of jumping up and up from wall to wall, in 3D, was a revelation."

Paul's first impression of the game centred on "using the central, solitary analogue stick to help Mario perform backflips and dodge and weave around the first level of the game", and it was the analogue stick that did a lot of the work in making the game feel so good. John explains the appeal well: "The self-centring thumb stick was the first viable analogue joystick I'd come across. Analogue sticks have been around forever but they were always near-enough impossible to use. *Mario* had effortless, expressive, intuitive control of a character in a 3D world," he says. "Back then, it was more or less accepted that 3D platformers don't work. There had been a few noble attempts but they were all difficult and confusing to play. Usually the gameplay was about overcoming the controls and camera restriction," he continues. "*Mario 64* had you running, skipping, backflipping, climbing trees and even flying. Nintendo had done the impossible."

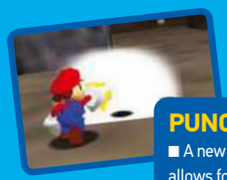
Of course, all of that excellent control would have been for nought if the game didn't provide adequate space to utilise it, and challenges to overcome. Nintendo delivered in both regards. Paul remembers the sense of disbelief in the office at the time. "The art designer of *C&VG* was asking me all these questions, because he doubted that much of what he had heard was true: 'Can I just run onto that bridge and jump into the water? And then I can swim? Under the water?'" For Gregg, the structure was as important as the space. "3D games up to this point felt restricted in where you could go and what you could do, but *Mario 64* removed these restrictions," he explains. "The freedom made the worlds a joy to explore, coupled with an progression system which allowed you to tackle challenges in the order you wanted to."

MARIO'S MARVELLOUS MOVES

A closer look at the portly plumber's amazingly agile abilities

MOVEMENT (Analogue Stick)

■ Full control over Mario's movement speed is an integral aspect of the game, allowing for a degree of freedom and precision that digital control simply can't offer in 3D space.

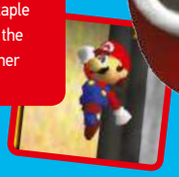


PUNCH B

■ A new addition to Mario's arsenal, this allows for more ways of interacting with the world, whether that be hitting blocks and switches or smacking enemies instead of jumping on them.

JUMP A

■ Perfect for when you don't want to be on the ground any more, Mario's staple move is as versatile as ever here – the longer you hold the button, the higher Mario will jump.



CROUCH Z

■ Where once you would just press down on the D-pad to make Mario crouch, here a bespoke button is needed. Rarely required on its own, but frequently incorporated into advanced techniques.

DOUBLE JUMP A, A

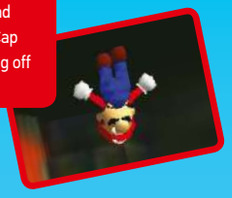
■ Time a second jump for immediately after you land from the first and you'll launch Mario slightly higher, with an audio cue to let you know you've performed this successfully.

KICK B (While jumping)

■ There's more to this move than it seems – it maintains Mario's momentum from whatever he's doing, making it a key ingredient of any speedrun rather than an offensive move.

TRIPLE JUMP A, A, A

■ A third timed leap is also possible, this time giving a much more obvious and useful height boost. With the Wing Cap on, this move will send Mario soaring off into the sky.



DIVE B (While moving)

■ Casual players might not like this move on account of how often it comes out instead of the punch while moving, but experts swear by it for grabbing objects without losing too much momentum.

BACKFLIP Z + A

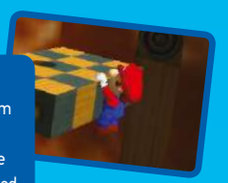
■ Similar to the direction-changing somersault, only performed from a static crouch. Given Mario's general mobility, the somersault is generally considered to be more useful.

SWEEP KICK Z + B

■ Useful for making Mario perform extremely brief breakdancing displays, but not a lot more, sadly. Still, variety is never a bad thing, so bust a move from time to time!

LONG JUMP Z + A (While running)

■ Timing is key to mastering this long-range leap – press and hold Z while running to crouch-slide and quickly press A to send Mario flying. Bold use of this can skip many obstacles and hazards.

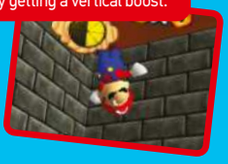


CLING (Land near platform edge or slowly walk off ledge)

■ Mario no longer has to fear death from slightly misjudging distance. Fall just short of a ledge and you'll grab the edge and can pull yourself up, sacrificing speed for safety.

SOMERSAULT (Analogue stick away from direction of running) + A

■ Jerk the stick away from the direction of travel and jump to perform a flip that goes much higher than a regular jump – great for quickly getting a vertical boost.



SLIDE KICK Z + B (While running)

■ Performed in the same manner as the long jump, only with B instead of A. This will earn you extra style points, but it's far from an essential part of Mario's repertoire.

WALL JUMP (Jump at wall, analogue stick away) + A

■ After launching himself directly into a wall, Mario can kick off it to change direction and gain height. Timing and execution are tricky, but mastery allows for some amazing shortcuts.

"With Super Mario 64 being the first of its kind, that became the de facto place to look for inspiration to solutions"

Chris Sutherland

» Chris Seavor was the brains behind *Conker's Bad Fur Day*.

» The camera would intelligently move to positions, likely to provide a helpful perspective.

Instead of the simple 'reach-the-goal' gameplay of 2D platform games, each course in *Super Mario 64* offered a selection of challenges, each of which awarded a Star upon completion. They could range from simply locating red coins to defeating bosses, winning races or just difficult platform challenges. Even Peach's Castle, the hub through which every other level was accessed, held Stars to find. Naturally, every player had their favourite moments. "Cool Cool Mountain was a favourite," says Gregg. "The way the slide race connected the top of the level to the bottom was really clever and Mario getting stuck head first in snow after a long fall was pure, indulgent charm."

"My memory is really fuzzy, but when I try to recall anything it's like looking at my happier moments of childhood," says Paul as he recounts some personal highlights. "Swinging Bowser by the tail. Finding that bottle underwater somewhere and being convinced that it held a door to a secret zone or something. We thought there would be treats hidden everywhere, and usually there was. Chasing the rabbit, because it was running away so may as well, and being led to something special." Mark found himself astounded by the longevity of the game. "Even later on, after you'd been playing the game for hours, there were new things to see," he remembers, "like when Mario turned into liquid metal. You then have this completely metal Mario, like the baddy from *Terminator 2*."

As soon as *Super Mario 64* became available in Japan on 23 June 1996, it began to receive rave reviews from the press. The list of accolades could run for pages, so we'll cut it down somewhat – 97% from *GamesMaster*, 96% each from *N64* and *Total 64*, 95% in *64 Magazine*. For the first time ever, *Edge* awarded its highest score of 10. Paul Davies called it "the best console game ever" in *Computer & Video Games* and he wasn't alone in making that claim, as *Maximum* concurred in its final issue. Enormous sales success accompanied the critical acclaim, with over 11 million copies making their way to players.

While *Super Mario 64* served as a source of boundless joy for players, it served as an enormous kick in the rear for developers of other 3D games – Nintendo was way out in front and everyone else was playing catch-up. "Every developer studied that game. Even more than ten years later it was quite common to see programmers boot up *Mario 64* to see how some aspect of the controls or camera systems worked," says John. "I'd say the first result of that was *Tomb Raider* which clearly benefited from that Shoshinkai 95 showing – particularly with the swimming controls."

Mark has a similar take on the game's influence. "It did definitely pave the way for the next generation of 3D platformers. Later games like *Banjo Kazooie* and *Donkey Kong 64*, two of my most favourite N64 titles, wouldn't have been as good had *Mario* not been as well put together," he remarks. "You can just see the programmers at Rare having *Super Mario* set up next to their stations looking at it and saying, 'Right, now we have to do *that* bit better.' And in a lot of cases, they did. But Mario showed the way forward."

Mark is dead on the money – the developers at Rare were definitely influenced by the work of what was then their parent company when creating those games. "At the time we [were] experimenting with a '2.5D' look for a platform game that felt like an evolution of the *Donkey Kong Country* games we had created, but after seeing *Mario 64* we knew fully-3D worlds were going to be the future," Gregg confirms. "In the past if we've looked to solve a problem we'd often look to see how other games have tackled similar issues," Chris Sutherland says. "With *Super Mario 64* being the first of its kind, that became the de facto place to look for inspiration to solutions when we started building 3D platformers on N64."

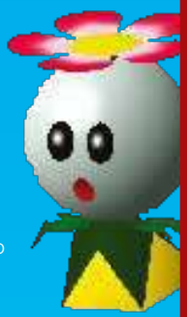
However, there were definitely areas in which the *Banjo-Kazooie* team looked to improve upon the *Super Mario 64* experience, and they put a lot of effort into distinguishing their game from Nintendo's classic. "We wanted to ensure *Banjo-Kazooie* had the Rare feel. I wanted Banjo the bear to have a very solid and predictable feel to his control, as opposed to the higher level of skill required to master the inertia that sometimes made *Mario*'s control challenging," notes

» If the camera ever proved unhelpful, you could even utilise a Mario's-perspective camera view.

» Mario's classic animations were transferred flawlessly into 3D, like this jumping motion.

Gregg. "I also wanted our worlds to feel a lot more grounded, basing each one in believable realism that was given a fantastical and humorous twist."

"We wanted to see more visual detail," Chris Sutherland elaborates, "especially as we'd just been producing very detailed prerendered visuals with games like *Donkey Kong Country*. The challenge is to not overwhelm the player with detail – it still needs to be clear what items can be walked on, when a floor is slippy and so on. Likewise, we wanted the architecture/geometry of the worlds to be more complex and interesting – but in doing so, the camera that follows the player needs to become more complex and clever to handle unusual situations and to avoid confusing the player."



Getting the camera right is a task that Gregg remembers vividly. "When I played *Mario 64* I didn't feel the camera was that good, but the reality of just how hard a job this is to get right become apparent when we created our own camera systems," he reminisces. "In hindsight, *Mario*'s camera had the right goals in trying to be as dynamic as possible and mostly got it right. The 3D worlds that we created were even more complex than *Mario*'s and created major headaches for us. Sadly a good camera system is invisible and something nobody talks about, but one that has even minor problems gets a lot of attention."

With Rare more accustomed to 3D game development by the time of *Conker's Bad Fur Day*,

» Metal Mario: he's heavy, but pretty unlikely to try to murder John Connor.

PLUMBING THE DEPTHS

Pushing Mario 64 in ways you wouldn't believe

As one of most-played games on the speedrun circuit, *Super Mario 64* has been pushed to the limits over the 20 years since its release. Countless bugs, glitches and quirks have been discovered in that time, some of which help towards the goal of getting completion times down, while others actively go against that concept. On the former front, various skips have been found that avoid triggering instances of text or brief cutscenes, each shaving valuable seconds off times. Far more noticeable, though, are the effects of the more significant glitches, most of which involve performing a backwards long jump (or BLJ for short) or some variant thereon. These can be used to skip the Star Doors that would otherwise gate access to the Bowser encounters, as well as the 'infinite staircase' that leads to the final level and showdown, making it possible to clear the game with far fewer than the 70 Stars usually required – the minimum was thought to be one (Board Bowser's Sub in Dire, Dire Docks) for a good while until an even more complex version of the BLJ trick was found that let that stage be skipped as well, opening the door to 0-Star runs (and ironically doing so without opening the door). These tricks allow for the credits to be reached in just a little over five minutes, while various categories exist for players who would still chase world record pace without having to use said tricks to do so.

At the other end of the spectrum lies the work of YouTuber pannenkoek2012, whose channel is filled with literally hundreds of videos in which he does everything from collecting every possible coin in each level to showcasing various glitches and oddities in the game that you won't see in a more refined speedrun where they would literally only cost time. More recently, however, he has found fame for a series of videos in which he attempts to collect many of the game's Stars in as few presses of the A button as is possible. These challenge runs, while interesting, only really started to garner attention in the last year or so, with commentated

» *Super Mario 64* is the most popular game on speedrun.com, with over 1,000 runners across a bunch of categories.

versions of several videos going so deep into the science of how each run works as to turn glitch mastery into an art form. In these videos (which are incredible, it must be said), you'll see how every stage exists on a near-infinite grid of so-called 'parallel universes', which have collision but no geometry; you'll hear terms like 'QPU Alignment', 'Syncing Speed', 'Half A-Press' and 'Held Object's Last Position' used in explaining feats of extreme mechanical manipulation; you'll discover just how long Mario needs to run on the spot in certain locations to build up enough speed to perform some of these crazy glitches (spoilers: it's *12 hours*).

Many of us reflect on *Super Mario 64* as an incredible highlight of our gaming lives – an amazing introduction to 3D gaming that set the stage for much of what came after. But for others, it's an obsession. And whether that means treating it like a race or like an in-depth science experiment, the fact that players are still discovering new things about this game two decades after release is nothing short of incredible.

Further Reading:

speedrun.com/sm64 - The fastest runs of the game – 70-Star and 120-Star runs are pure skill exhibitions, while lower categories combine this with glitch exhibitions.

tasvideos.org/SM64TASHistory - Tool-assisted videos that show optimal routing and the evolution of glitch-led runs, from the first 16-Star run back in 2005 to the effectively perfect run recorded in 2012.

youtube.com/pannenkoek2012 - pannenkoek's YouTube channel, which goes into insane depth on just how far *Super Mario 64*'s mechanics can be twisted and broken.

» Calculating Mario's speed based on terrain is an integral part of successfully visiting parallel universes.

» Andrew Oliver is well aware of creating 3D platformers for the N64, having made *Glover*.

many of those initial technical challenges were less of a problem. Still, it was a game which tried to top *Super Mario 64* in certain areas, and Chris Seavor pulls no punches in pointing them out. "The visuals… let's be honest, *Mario 64* had some ugly-looking assets in there," he notes, and it's fair to say that *Conker* came out ahead in this regard thanks to Rare's knowledge of the N64's hardware, and particularly its texturing quirks. The structure of the game was tweaked too. "We also added more of a narrative to the world, driving the player forward not so much to get the next Star, but to see where the stories and characters lead you."

Still, Gregg is under no illusions as to how difficult it was to compete with such a groundbreaking game. "*Mario 64* got so many things right that it was hard for following games to make significant improvements," he opines. "Other games had more impressive visuals, used the performance of the hardware better and created worlds that had more depth, but few got close to matching things like *Mario*'s control."

> **"Mario 64 got so many things right that it was hard for following games to make significant improvements"**
> Gregg Mayles

Over at Interactive Studios, the *Glover* team was discovering the same thing. "*Mario* set a high bar of quality to meet," says Andrew. "We were prototyping *Glover*, first on PC and then on an N64 dev kit, and we were getting great results that we were very happy with. But suddenly, we were playing a huge game that had solved a few problems more elegantly that we had. For example, it had smoothed-skinned characters, unlike the hinged, segmented 3D characters that PlayStation and *Glover* had! We decided we had to ensure our characters looked just as smooth and had to work out how to make an animated skinned character renderer." That wasn't the only innovation that Andrew and the *Glover* team had to compete with. "We just spent ages trying to work out what the logic was for the camera so we could get somewhere close," he remarks. "Technically we figured out most things, as *Glover* demonstrates, but *Mario* was still obviously a better game."

With the developers telling us how far they went to match Nintendo's effort, it's clear that *Super Mario 64* had a huge impact on videogames, so we asked them to quantify it. For John, it was a game that accelerated the pace of progress in game development. "Nintendo solved the problems of third-person control in 3D video games and presented the industry with a 'how to do it' in the form of *Mario 64*," he says. "I think the industry would have figured it out eventually without Nintendo's help but *Mario 64* saved us probably five years worth of failed experiments and clunky controls."

For Andrew, it was nothing less than proof that polygon technology was actually viable. "It made everyone realise that 3D was the future, and not just of driving games, but all games! It looked so good, and gave some personality to the characters," he says. "The worlds were big and interesting and it immersed players in a deep and beautiful fantasy world. Over on the PlayStation, it still felt that 3D was struggling and whilst technically impressive, the gameplay or graphics were generally suffering for the 3D experience. *Mario 64* showed the way forward for the whole industry!"

"It was the first of its kind and a genuine 'Wow Moment' in gaming that excited even the most jaded of people. It was a combination of revolution combined with one of the most prominent and successful series of games," says Gregg, summarising the legacy of the game. However, he also adds a important point: "It's also stood the test of time. Play *Mario 64* today and it's still got the ability to transform you into a playful child where just doing things without thought is great fun."

That's the key thing to remember about *Mario 64*. It was undoubtedly a groundbreaking and technologically-impressive game, as the developers we've spoken to have testified. Time marches on though, and other games have entered the conversation as points of reference for 3D game design. If *Super Mario 64* had just been a technical achievement, we'd remember it as an important release. But *Super Mario 64* was always a supremely enjoyable game first and foremost – and the decades that have passed since it released haven't dulled that in the slightest.

» Challenges for Stars were rather unusual compared to previous *Mario* games – this Koopa wants to race you.

» Using the analogue stick gently, Mario can tiptoe past this sleeping enemy without waking it.

There were years when I didn't play it and when I got back into retro games I worried that it might not have aged well and I was hesitant to have another go at it," Mark confesses. "But I can happily report that even now, with the novelty of the graphics having worn off, *Mario 64* is still one of the best and most fun games to play on any machine *ever!*" He's in no doubt as to why that is, too. "Nintendo didn't just rely on the graphics to wow everyone, they also concentrated on the puzzles and gameplay. So they still spent as much time on the gameplay as they had done on the previous *Mario* titles but had added in this huge world that seemingly burst out of this little bit of plastic you just stuck in the top of your machine before you turned it on."

That's why *Super Mario 64* is still as relevant today as it has ever been. The kids who grew up with N64s are adults now, and their love for the game and its successors is the reason behind the success of crowdfunding campaigns for traditional 3D platformer revivals, including *A Hat In Time* and Playtonic's *Yooka-Laylee*. *Super Mario 64*'s supreme gameplay is the reason that people are still playing today, years after most people nabbed that last Star and had a chat with Yoshi on top of the castle. People simply aren't tired of the game – and if you needed any proof of that, hop online and look at the abundance of *Super Mario 64* speedruns, challenge runs and modified versions.

But don't take our word for it. Dig out a copy of *Super Mario 64* and start up a new file. Spend a minute or two pottering around the castle to get a feel for how Mario controls before leaping into Bob-Omb Battlefield. We'd be surprised if those few minutes don't turn into hours – and years later, developers are still trying to make games that are so compelling.

» Most of the extended cast was absent for *Super Mario 64* – Luigi doesn't appear, and Yoshi only has a cameo.

LEAPS OF FAITH

Five games that made the jump to 3D in style...

METROID PRIME 2002

■ Many wondered how the exploration of *Metroid* could ever work in 3D, but Retro Studios came through with the perfect answer. Encapsulating *Metroid*'s sense of isolation and freedom, while being a showcase for the GameCube, it's one of the greatest examples of 2D-to-3D done right.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME 1998

■ Just as it had done with *Super Mario 64*, Nintendo embraced the third dimension when updating *Zelda* for a new generation. The game was imbued with a very real sense of verticality that helped make it absolutely jaw-dropping.

GRAND THEFT AUTO III 2001

■ Alongside *Super Mario 64* and *Ocarina Of Time*, *GTA III* was instrumental in establishing the template for modern 3D games, especially open world titles. Minimal prelaunch fanfare only made its impact all the more incredible and it had a real sense of place and personality.

FINAL FANTASY VII 1997

■ A curious case study, as the move to 3D graphics actually had little impact on the gameplay formula. It did, however, allow for impressive cutscenes and a more cinematic feel – two things that both tied in beautifully to the greater storage capacity CDs had over cartridges.

METAL GEAR SOLID 1998

■ As with *FFVII*, the polygons of *MGS* allowed for a then-unprecedented level of cinematic presentation. Kojima and his team took this concept and ran with it, too – Snake's PlayStation sneaking mission is widely accepted to be the birthplace of modern cinematic gaming.

...and five that stumbled and fell into the depths of infamy

FADE TO BLACK 1995

■ Many would argue that *Flashback* never needed a sequel, and this oddity serves as evidence for the truth of that statement. Crude 3D visuals were a far cry from the mind-blowing original, it's redeemed somewhat by its decent character animation.

BUBSY 3D 1996

■ Famously one of the worst games ever made, this took the unlikable *Sonic* rip-off, dumped him into an ugly 3D world that looked to be made out of placeholder assets and left it at that. Random deaths and horrendous pop-in abound in this abhorrent waste of time and money.

EARTHWORM JIM 3D 1999

■ Handing the reins to an untested developer for something so difficult as making the jump from 2D to full 3D doesn't sound like the best of plans, as this effort proves. Bland environments were a departure from the colourful backdrops of the original and the camera had a mind of its own.

CASTLEVANIA 64 1999

■ One of the reasons people thought *Metroid* could never work in 3D was that *Castlevania* struggled to transition. Camera once again proved to be fatally flawed in early attempts at 3D vampire hunting, at odds with the pinpoint precision for which the series was known.

PRINCE OF PERSIA 3D 1999

■ While this 3D debut wasn't as dreadful as some efforts, its poor control and awkward animations were just made to look even worse thanks to how impressive these aspects had been in the original game. The camera was also horrible – a standard pitfall of 3D gaming.

THE
EVOLUTION OF
POKÉMON
TM

EXPLOSIVELY POPULAR IN THE NINETIES, POKÉMON HAS OUTLIVED THE INITIAL FAD AND BECOME ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR SERIES OF GAMES. NICK THORPE TALKS TO THE DEVELOPERS ABOUT THE SERIES THAT CHALLENGES YOU TO "CATCH 'EM ALL"...

It's extremely hard not to be aware of *Pokémon* – if you haven't been tempted by the urge to catch 'em all, you probably know someone who has. The videogames have sold over 200 million units, with some titles topping the 10 million mark. It's far more than just a gaming phenomenon, though – since the series launched in the UK back in 1999, Pikachu's smiling face has appeared everywhere from trading cards to cinema screens. However, it may come as a surprise to many of you that the origins of the series go all the way back to 1990.

The *Pokémon* series has always been primarily developed by Game Freak, a Japanese team which grew out of a fanzine of the same name produced by writer Satoshi Tajiri and illustrator Ken Sugimori. "When we first started, some of the readers were actually programmers and they had the skills and access to the hardware – that's how we started in producing videogames," Ken explained in a **games™** interview on the history of the series. The firm made its debut in 1989 with *Quinty*, a Famicom puzzle game localised for the North American NES market as *Mendel Palace*. That same year, the Game Boy was released and Game Freak moved quickly to outline a vision of a new type of RPG, which would utilise the handheld's link cable and portable nature. A design document entitled 'Capsule Monsters' was ready by 1990.

» Junichi Masuda has overseen the whole series.

» Shigeru Ohmori has directed the 3DS remakes.

When you examine the *Pokémon* games on the most basic level, they are fairly typical Japanese RPGs with a few key twists. The first is that as a Pokémon trainer, instead of gathering party members through the storyline, you recruit the monsters you encounter in the wild. This element is present in the early design documents, though the original idea involved players ▶

▶ having a charisma stat, whereas in the final game they simply lower a wild Pokémon's health until it can't resist being captured in a Poké Ball. These monsters have special types, such as Fire and Water, which make some Pokémon more or less effective against others. The second major twist is that the games each contain a strong multiplayer element, atypical of RPGs, in which players can trade their creatures or engage in battles. Some Pokémon even require trading to evolve into their stronger upgraded forms. This was also a key part of the pitch document, forming the centrepiece of Satoshi Tajiri's vision for the game.

The final twist is that each game comes in at least two versions, with a select number of Pokémon absent from each. The brainchild of Shigeru Miyamoto, a friend and mentor of Satoshi, this was a stroke of genius – rather than having the ability to obtain all the monsters with enough dedicated solo play, players were required to engage with the multiplayer functions of the game. Also speaking to **games™**, composer and programmer Junichi Masuda explained, "People say that when you're playing videogames, you're usually playing on your own. So we wanted to create an experience where you can play the game but still play together with friends at the same time and all have fun."

The game went into development, changing titles from *Capsule Monsters* to *Pocket Monsters* due to trademark difficulty, and stayed there for a very long time. Despite having been pitched soon after the release of the Game Boy, *Pocket Monsters* wouldn't arrive in Japan until the start of 1996 – a time when the monochrome hardware looked to be on its last legs. *Pocket Monsters Red* and *Green* followed the standard RPG model outlined above, with the key differences changing the goal of the game. The single-player quest involved gathering eight badges from battling gym leaders – other trainers that served as bosses – before taking on the Elite Four and your rival, as a final boss run. Once that was done, the social aspect of the game became necessary as you sought to complete your collection of 150 Pokémon.

The wrinkle in the formula was that there was actually another creature, the 151st Pokémon, Mew. The legendary monster was added late in development in space created after the game's debug tools were removed, an untested addition that would be unthinkable today. Luckily, Mew didn't cause problems – it turned out to be something of a solution. Unavailable during regular

» Quests in the games usually involve ferrying items around or beating up an evil faction.

» *Pokémon Gold* and *Silver* established the convention of adding new Pokémon in sequels.

POKÉMON SILVER SCREEN

There's a good chance that your first exposure to the *Pokémon* franchise didn't come from the games but the animated series. It follows Ash Ketchum's adventures as a Pokémon trainer, accompanied by his trusty Pikachu and initially gym leaders Brock and Misty, who were later replaced by a rotating cast of companions. Along the way they take part in gym battles and capture new Pokémon, and are regularly attacked by inept Team Rocket grunts Jessie and James, along with their talking Meowth.

The show has been a huge success and remains in production today, with over 850 episodes produced as well as an astonishing 17 movies. The first film grossed over $163 million worldwide and was briefly the highest-grossing movie based on a videogame – a record later taken by the 2001 adaptation of *Tomb Raider*. However, it's often criticised for poor animation and an overwhelming focus on Ash's Pikachu, who wins battles he really shouldn't.

The *Pokémon* cartoon series has had five episodes removed from circulation globally, predominantly to show sensitivity following real-world disasters, along with three more removed from the English-language run due to issues such as use of weaponry. However, the biggest controversy was an episode featuring the virtual Pokémon Porygon, which sent hundreds of Japanese children to hospital in 1997 after triggering fits with flashing imagery.

» While *Gold* and *Silver* supported the GBC, both still worked on the original Game Boy.

» Maps reflected the change from day to night, with towns growing dark and lights switching on.

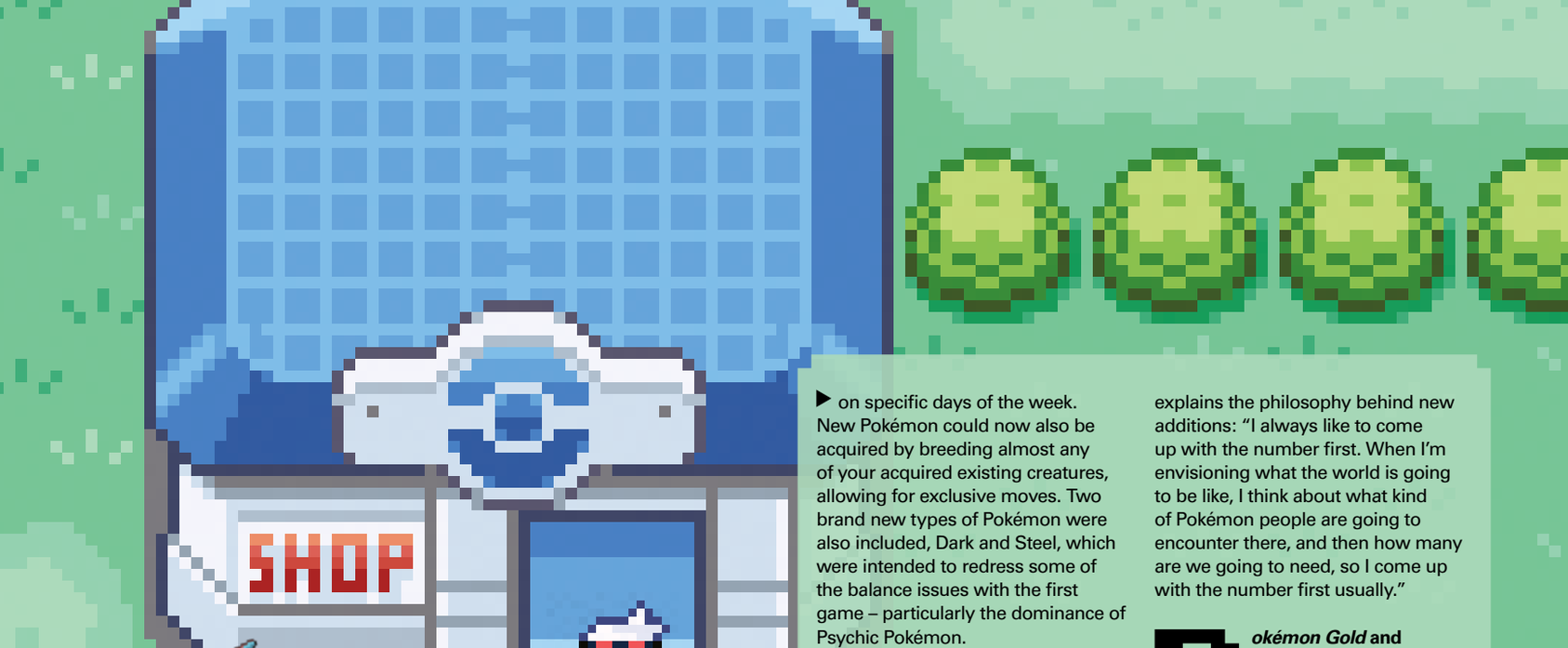
play, Mew did occasionally appear via glitches and rumours of how to obtain it began to form. Mew was able to be distributed to cartridges at special events, the first of which was a competition in CoroCoro Comics which attracted 70,000 entries. Word of mouth spread and the game's initially sluggish sales turned around, later aided by additional merchandising. Though *Pocket Monsters Red* and *Green* were released in February 1996, they didn't hit their peak sales until the summer of 1997.

After a lengthy localisation delay, *Pocket Monsters* – now retitled *Pokémon*, and in *Red* and *Blue* versions – arrived in the USA in 1998, then Europe and other PAL territories in 1999. The slow build seen in Japan wouldn't be a factor in these territories, as *Pokémon* arrived with a co-ordinated marketing blitz that saw the TV series, trading card game and videogames hit almost simultaneously. A craze started almost overnight, helped along by additional special versions such as *Pokémon Yellow*, which starred Pikachu and took elements from the TV series. Ultimately, the first generation of games sold over 23 million copies. But while the first games were still making waves internationally, a sequel was needed for Japan and arrived in late 1999.

"You can still play together with friends at the same time and all have fun"

Junichi Masada extols the social aspect of Pokémon

Pokémon Gold and *Silver* served as the first massive overhaul to the series, providing a brand new quest in a new region, Johto. The most immediately obvious new feature was a visual overhaul as a result of Game Boy Color support. However, the changes went far deeper. A battery-powered real-time clock was included in the cartridge, affecting what happened in-game. Certain Pokémon were more abundant during the day while others could only be found at night, and other events only took place ▶



PokéFacts

FASTEST/SLOWEST POKÉMON:

DEOXYS: 180 : MUNCHLAX: 5

(Base stat)

▶ on specific days of the week. New Pokémon could now also be acquired by breeding almost any of your acquired existing creatures, allowing for exclusive moves. Two brand new types of Pokémon were also included, Dark and Steel, which were intended to redress some of the balance issues with the first game – particularly the dominance of Psychic Pokémon.

However, the big new inclusion was that of 100 new Pokémon. These included extra evolutionary stages for existing Pokémon, such as Pichu, the baby form of Pikachu, and Slowking, a second stage for Slowpoke which serves as an alternative to the first game's Slowbro. Also, another special event Pokémon like Mew was included in the form of Celebi. Junichi, who would become director of the series following *Gold* and *Silver*, explains the philosophy behind new additions: "I always like to come up with the number first. When I'm envisioning what the world is going to be like, I think about what kind of Pokémon people are going to encounter there, and then how many are we going to need, so I come up with the number first usually."

***Pokémon Gold* and *Silver* were massively successful worldwide, achieving 23 million** sales in a much shorter period than the first generation of games due to quicker localisation. An enhanced third version followed with *Pokémon Crystal*, but new hardware was already on the horizon in the form of the Game Boy Advance. A new generation of games was already on the way, this time titled *Pokémon Ruby* and *Sapphire*.

"I always like to come up with the number first"

How Junichi Masada goes about the process of introducing brand new Pokémon to the series

A BREED APART

Lots of alternative monster-raising games are available for hipsters to enjoy...

MONSTER RANCHER

FORMAT: PlayStation
YEAR: 1997

■ Tecmo's spin on the genre offers similar battling gameplay to *Pokémon*, but a very different monster acquisition system. Players generate new creatures by putting music CDs into the PlayStation's disc drive!

DRAGON WARRIOR MONSTERS

FORMAT: Game Boy Color
YEAR: 1998

■ A spin-off of Enix's RPG series, this was the strongest *Pokémon* competitor on the Game Boy, offering 215 monsters and a deep breeding system which helped set it apart. PlayStation and 3DS remakes have followed.

JADE COCOON

FORMAT: PlayStation
YEAR: 1998

■ The game's unique look was created by Katsuya Kondo, an animator and character designer famed for his work on Studio Ghibli films such as *Kiki's Delivery Service*. Decent sales ensured that a PlayStation 2 sequel followed in 2001.

DIGIMON WORLD

FORMAT: PlayStation
YEAR: 1999

■ Bandai's rival franchise has never scaled the same heights as *Pokémon*, but the games are fondly remembered by those who grew up with them. One difference is that only one partner Digimon accompanies you throughout the main quest.

FINAL FANTASY XIII-2

FORMAT: PS3/Xbox 360
YEAR: 2011

■ The middle child of Square Enix's RPG trilogy lets players capture monsters during battle, to serve as party members. As in *Pokémon Red* and *Blue*, there are roughly 150 monsters to collect and strengthen.

These games took place in another new region, Hoenn. "With the Hoenn region I wanted to go for a feel of abundant nature," explains Junichi. "When I was younger, my grandparents lived in Kyushu and I would visit them, and whenever I was there I'd always be catching bugs, playing in the river, catching fish and stuff like that, so I wanted to bring that feeling of nature to the games." The cohort of new Pokémon included 135 creatures, raising the total number to collect to 386. However, despite support in the code for all 386, only 202 could be caught in *Ruby* and *Sapphire* and trading with previous generations was impossible, creating a problem that the developers would need to solve later. Major improvements were made to the battle system, including team battles in which four Pokémon could fight and a new ability system, which gave Pokémon passive powers that affected battle.

However, the biggest change was an expansion to the non-battling play available, with the inclusion of Pokémon contests in which your creatures would perform their moves in front of a judging panel, in competition with other trainers. "At the time when we were developing the games, we really wanted to think of a way to expand the appeal of the Pokémon games," reveals Junichi. "So we thought of a variety of ways that people could enjoy gameplay with Pokémon without battling them." Despite this attempt to expand the appeal of the series, *Pokémon Ruby* and *Sapphire* didn't sell as well as previous games. However, even a dip below par for *Pokémon* produces results that other series can only dream of – with 16 million copies sold, the games were comfortably the bestselling titles on the Game Boy Advance.

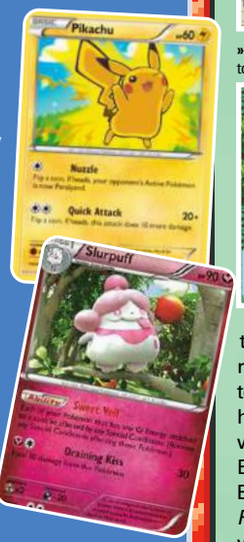
CARD CATCHER

Taking the battles from cartridge to cardboard

The Pokémon Trading Card Game, first introduced in October 1996 in Japan, is an unusual spin-off product in that has taken on a life beyond that of the videogames. It depicts battles similar to those in the videogames, with a few key differences – Pokémon are able to evolve during the course of the battle, and must utilise Energy cards to attack and retreat. The game ends when either one player has no Pokémon in play, or a player has revealed their six prize cards by knocking out opposing Pokémon.

When *Magic: The Gathering* publisher Wizards Of The Coast licensed the game for English-speaking audiences in the late Nineties, many players ignored the battling gameplay and focused on trading and collecting. The popularity of the cards was such that many schools banned them, fearing problems with thefts and uneven trades. A foil Charizard was the most prized card from the first base set – a first-edition copy in good condition can still fetch a pretty penny today.

The Pokémon Company assumed worldwide control of the game in 2003 and continues to offer it both as a physical card game and a digital version (for PC, Mac and iPad). But if you're looking for a more retro way to enjoy it, the card game received its own GBC adaptations, too. Hudson Soft's 1998 *Pokémon Trading Card Game* tasked the player with beating AI opponents in an RPG-style quest. It was well-received by players and critics alike, selling over two million copies and spawning a Japan-only sequel in 2001, which eventually received a fan translation in 2012.



"We thought of a variety of ways people could enjoy gameplay with Pokémon without battling them"

Junichi Masada explains the introduction of Pokémon contests

» Certain moves became more useful thanks to *Ruby* and *Sapphire*'s team battles, since they hit all opponents.

In 2004, *Pokémon FireRed* and *LeafGreen* were released. These were the first *Pokémon* remakes, and according to Junichi were a part of the plan as soon as the series moved to the Game Boy Advance. "One of the main reasons [for developing remakes] was really more of a technological reason, as the hardware couldn't communicate with each other between the Game Boy and the Game Boy Advance. Even when we were first developing *Ruby* and *Sapphire* we knew we wanted to players to be able to catch all of the old Pokémon as well as the newer ones." *FireRed* and *LeafGreen* were faithful remakes with improved visuals and some expanded content to include *Ruby* and *Sapphire*'s improvements, most notably an additional post-game quest in the new Sevii Islands region. Success followed once again, with critical acclaim and around 12 million sales.

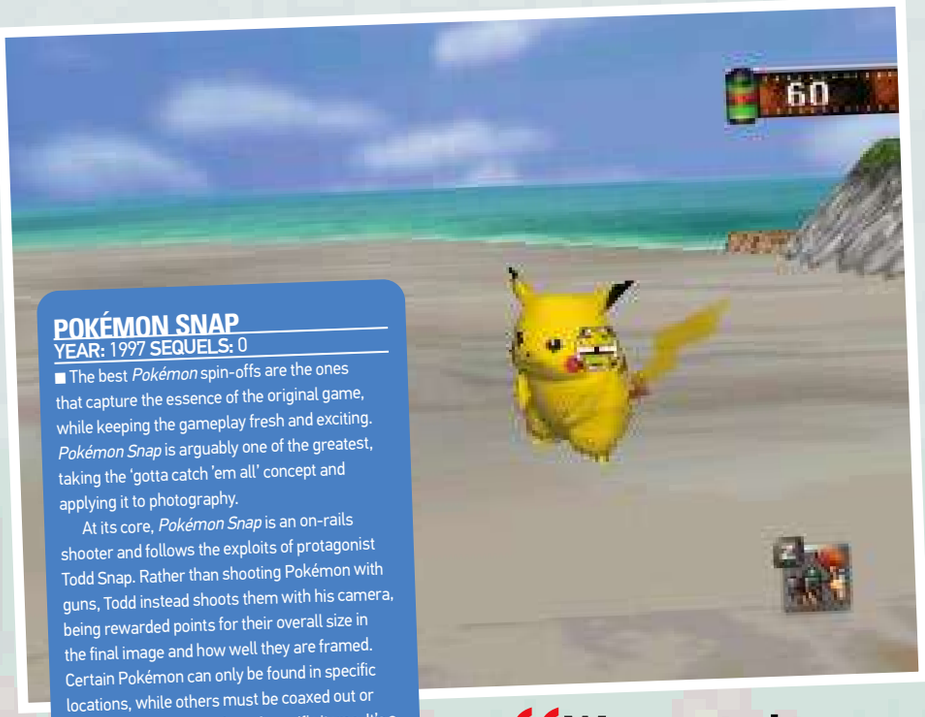
The Game Boy Advance was superseded by the Nintendo DS at the tail end of 2004, but with *Pokémon FireRed* and *LeafGreen* having just completed their worldwide release cycle, it was clear that all eyes were still on the older systems. While the DS received the forgettable spin-off *Pokémon Dash*, the Game Boy Advance got *Pokémon Emerald*, a substantial game which served a similar purpose to *Pokémon Crystal* by providing an enhanced third version of *Ruby* and *Sapphire*. Fans would have to wait until 2006 to get their hands on the fourth generation of Pokémon games. ▶

» The GBA's graphical prowess allowed the designers to make towns that looked more realistic.

» *Ruby* and *Sapphire* introduced rival factions of evildoers to defeat – Team Aqua and Team Magma.

THE SPIN-OFFS

There are an insane number of Pokémon offshoots, so Darran decided to look at the best and worst examples



POKÉMON SNAP

YEAR: 1997 **SEQUELS:** 0

■ The best *Pokémon* spin-offs are the ones that capture the essence of the original game, while keeping the gameplay fresh and exciting. *Pokémon Snap* is arguably one of the greatest, taking the 'gotta catch 'em all' concept and applying it to photography.

At its core, *Pokémon Snap* is an on-rails shooter and follows the exploits of protagonist Todd Snap. Rather than shooting Pokémon with guns, Todd instead shoots them with his camera, being rewarded points for their overall size in the final image and how well they are framed. Certain Pokémon can only be found in specific locations, while others must be coaxed out or flushed by using a number of specific items. It's a great game and it's absolutely criminal that there have been no sequels for it.

HEY YOU, PIKACHU!

YEAR: 1998 **SEQUELS:** 0

■ No doubt inspired by the interest in Tamagotchi, developer Ambrella clearly thought the concept could be applied to *Pokémon*. It couldn't, as proven by this innovative yet highly disappointing game. Players use the N64's Voice Recognition Unit to interact with Pikachu. It can take part in a variety of activities, from fishing to making stew, but poor controls and rudimentary voice technology make it too frustrating to play. Spirituals sequels exist in the form of *Pokémon Channel* for the GameCube and two *PokéPark* games for the Wii, but they're just as disappointing.

"We wanted to go more in-depth and actually have Pokémon appear in the game world"

Shigeru Ohmori on one of the striking new features in Omega Ruby and Alpha Sapphire

POKÉMON STADIUM

YEAR: 1999 **SEQUELS:** 1

■ When Nintendo revealed Pokémon were heading to the N64, we assumed an awesome 3D-based RPG. We assumed wrong.

Despite our initial disappointment, *Pokémon Stadium* proved an essential addition to any Pokéfan's collection, due to its ability to let you transfer – via the Transfer Pak – Pokémon from *Red* and *Blue* and battle with them in glorious 3D. Fighting takes place across four cups, with the player choosing from six available Pokémon. It's essentially just the scrapping from the original games, but made better due to the impressive-looking visuals. We'd argue the sequel is the better game, however, due to some truly brilliant mini-games.

POKÉMON PINBALL

YEAR: 1999 **SEQUELS:** 1

■ *Pokémon Pinball* was another early Pokémon release that proved Nintendo's pocket monsters were perfectly at home in other genres. It's most memorable for being one of the first Game Boy Color games to feature the underused rumble pack, resulting in an oversized cartridge. While the physics are a little off at times, the two tables – Red and Blue – are well crafted and feature lots of interesting spinners and ramps. Best of all, however, are the 'Catch' and 'Evolution' modes that see you either trying to capture or evolve a specific Pokémon in under two minutes. And if you want that true Pokémon vibe, then use the Pokédex to catch all 151 Pokémon.

POKÉMON CONQUEST

YEAR: 2012 **SEQUELS:** 0

■ Quite possibly the strangest *Pokémon* game we've played, but a good one to boot. *Pokémon Conquest* is a kiddie-friendly strategy game that splices the popular franchise with Tecmo Koei's *Nobunaga's Ambition* series. It works surprisingly well with the player travelling the Ransei Region, battling Pokémon, warriors and warlords in a bid to unite the region as one nation. It's a vastly different RPG compared to the usual games and offers plenty of tactical play, while its weird crossover status should ensure it becomes quite rare in later years.

POKÉMON MYSTERY DUNGEON

YEAR: 2005 **SEQUELS:** 4

■ The big hook of *Mystery Dungeon* was that it was the first time you could properly play as Pokémon. The fact that its two versions let it link between the Game Boy Advance and DS didn't make it too shabby either. For those unaware, it's effectively Game Freak's spin on the rogue genre, with Pikachu and pals exploring popular locations from the series and taking part in turn-based battles. While easier than most examples of the genre, it's still quite tricky in places and link-up with both versions is crucial if you want to gain access to all the available Pokémon.

POKÉMON RANGER

YEAR: 2006 **SEQUELS:** 2

■ Trust Nintendo to make drawing patterns interesting. Unlike previous *Pokémon* games, *Ranger* requires you to capture Pokémon by drawing specific circles around them. It's clearly used as a justification for the DS's unique control system, but it admittedly works well, getting quite challenging on later stages. Unfortunately, while the mini-game-based capture sections are good fun, the main adventuring is pretty dull and feels quite light compared to typical *Pokémon* adventures.

POKÉMON DASH

YEAR: 2004 **SEQUELS:** 0

■ The best thing about this DS launch game was its ability to link up with GBA versions of the available Pokémon to create new courses to race on. Unfortunately, that's the only thing this insipidly dull game has going for it. Racing Pokémon through checkpoint-based courses sounds great fun, but the reality is vastly different due to incredibly bland track design and overly simplistic gameplay. Pikachu runs in whichever direction you swipe, which is as dull as it sounds, while a variety of different terrains and power-ups attempt to inject some entertainment into Ambrella's game.

» While 3D visuals made their debut in *Diamond* and *Pearl*, the presentation was little changed.

***Pokémon Diamond* and *Pearl* brought a raft of changes for fans to enjoy, many of which were by** now series standards. The game took place in the brand new Sinnoh region, a large island bisected by a long mountain range. Eight new gym leaders and a new Elite Four were available to battle, and 107 new Pokémon were added for players to catch, bringing the complete total up to 493. The battle system was also further refined, with many attacks reclassified as physical or special based on how they operated – for example, Volt Tackle became a physical attack as it involves one Pokémon making contact with another, while Shadow Ball doesn't and therefore became special. However, the most exciting new possibilities were a direct result of the series' move to a new platform.

For a start, the DS was Nintendo's first handheld platform to be designed for 3D graphics, which had the potential to revolutionise the way the games were presented. However, *Diamond* and *Pearl* were relatively tentative steps into 3D – battles received an improved set of 2D sprites so only the environments were overhauled in 3D, and they rarely offered much functional difference to their 2D counterparts. Still, they did allow for some surprising new design possibilities, as Junichi recalls: "One of the great things about moving to the 3D environments with the DS games was that we could do a lot more dynamic presentation, for example moving the camera around freely. It's kind of hard to explain, but being able to control the camera actually changes the

» Pokémon can follow you outside of their Poké Balls in the fourth-gen games, a feature that debuted in *Yellow*.

THE UNLIKELY LADS

Some Pokémon that are freaky, unnatural and downright impossible

MAGCARGO

■ With a body temperature stated to be over 18,000 degrees Fahrenheit, this Pokémon is absolutely incredibly hot. How hot? Almost twice as hot as the surface of the sun, which reaches only 9940.73 Fahrenheit, fact fans…

SPOINK

■ This pig-like creature has a rather unfortunate life – if it ever stops bouncing on its springy tail, its heart will stop beating. That's right, it dies. We prefer a Tigger-esque state of compulsion to a life or death situation, frankly.

TRUBBISH

■ It's a bin bag! More specifically, it's a bin bag with tie-top ears, a broken glass mouth and arms that look like spilled waste, formed from a chemical reaction within domestic and industrial waste. This makes perfect sense, of course.

YAMASK

■ This ghostly Pokémon retains memories of its former life, as well as a mask it occasionally looks at while weeping. Oh yes, and these guys are human ghosts – so what awaits you in the afterlife, it seems, is captivity. Sweet dreams.

VANILLITE

■ Created by British designer James Turner, Vanillite is a Pokémon which strongly resembles an ice cream cone. In fact, its snowy topping can be made to melt, exposing a bald, icy head. It gains extra scoops as it evolves, too.

▶ balance of the game quite a bit." In *Diamond* and *Pearl*, you can see this best in the design of the gyms – for example, a low camera angle in Eterna Gym allows trainers to hide behind trees.

The other massive change was the addition of online connectivity. The DS was Nintendo's first real foray into online gaming, and Pokémon was a key part of the software supporting the move. For the first time ever, players with access to a wireless internet connection could battle and trade their Pokémon without being in close proximity to one another, and without the need for additional peripherals. It was a huge step forward for players looking to complete their collections and prove their teams against trainers worldwide. However, the advent of online play meant that nobody ever needed to leave their home to catch 'em all. It's at this point that creating a main series Pokémon game for home consoles might have seemed most appealing, and it's something fans have often requested. However, Junichi sees things differently.

"One of the reasons that we continue to feel that handheld platforms are the best place for *Pokémon* is that with a handheld platform, you can take the game with you. We really like to focus on creating incentive for people to meet up with each other in real life. For example, if there's a special Pokémon distribution, people will go to meet each other and fans will talk… about the games. Creating that kind of atmosphere, kind of like a festival, is something that we really like with the *Pokémon* games. Obviously you

» Legendary Pokémon are typically encountered only once, disappearing if you knock them out or fail to catch them.

can also play them at home alone now, and that's another way to play, but being able to do both of them is one of the best parts of being on a handheld platform."

It's an understandable position, especially as the handheld games continue to perform so well. *Pokémon Diamond* and *Pearl* sold a combined 18 million and were followed by an enhanced third version in 2008, *Pokémon Platinum*. A fifth generation of games was on the way, but once again a remake project would serve as an interlude. *Pokémon HeartGold* and *SoulSilver* remade *Gold* and *Silver* as full fourth-generation *Pokémon* games, with brand new visuals and all of the system changes that had been implemented. They also came bundled with the Pokéwalker, an LCD toy that allowed players to transfer their Pokémon from the cartridge via an infrared link and raise their stats simply by walking around. The

» Unova's urban design was inspired by metropolises such as New York, with tall buildings and subway tunnels.

» Gym layouts have become increasingly elaborate in recent games – even remade ones like this example gain some new tricks.

» The urban regions of *Black* and *White* look more realistic, thanks to less grid-based map design.

device also allowed players to obtain items and catch extra Pokémon, but was sadly not compatible with future games in the series.

The fifth generation of games, launching with *Pokémon Black* and *White*, was in some ways a radical departure from previous entries in the series. "The main goal with *Black* and *White* was to make the same experience for existing *Pokémon* fans as well as brand new players," explains Junichi, "so everyone playing the game would experience the same surprises and joy." In practice, this meant that for the first time in the series, the only Pokémon players could encounter were the new ones. It was a welcome change for fans who had experienced over a decade of caverns filled with Zubats and Geodudes, and older Pokémon once again became available after the Elite Four were beaten.

Other improvements were also seen. The new Unova region, an urban area inspired by the state of New York, was the best-looking yet thanks to improved 3D visuals and map designs that were no longer constrained to grids as in previous games. Seasons now passed as well as time, though at an accelerated rate of one per month, and Pokémon contests were replaced with the upgraded Pokémon musicals. There was also a Pokémon Dream World feature, which enabled Pokémon to be sent to the internet to obtain otherwise unobtainable Pokémon. This feature has sadly been closed.

Over 15 million copies of *Pokémon Black* and *White* were sold following the games' release in 2010, marking another success and ensuring the production of the now-traditional enhanced version. However, one more surprising break with tradition was left: a traditionally numbered sequel. "With *Black* and *White*, a lot of things from a story perspective were left unfinished, some of which were done on purpose. A lot of the staff really wanted to revisit those and tie up some of the loose ends," Junichi recalls. "I remember at the time a lot of people were expecting a *Pokémon Grey* to come out, but I knew originally that I wanted to put out two versions for the game that came after *Black* and *White*, as we had a lot of ideas we wanted to implement with that – two versions, we'd set the story two years later, and with various other elements of 'two' we thought we'd put that in the name." The games boasted greater differences than previous enhanced versions, with a substantially different story and new locations.

» Old Pokémon like Mewtwo have been updated for the first time in generations, due to the new Mega Evolutions.

"We really like to focus on creating incentive for people to meet up with each other in real life"

Why the main series sticks to handheld systems, according to Junich Masada

Pokémon Black 2 and *White 2* were the swansong of the Nintendo DS, which had already been superseded by the 3DS when they were released in 2012. Nintendo's latest handheld saw its first major *Pokémon* release late in 2013, with *Pokémon X* and *Y* marking the series' first simultaneous worldwide release. Battles now take place with full 3D visuals of the kind previously seen in console games like *Pokémon Stadium*, and players are finally set free from four-way grid movement. A new Fairy type has also been added, in order to balance the previously strong Dragon type.

But the biggest change concerns Pokémon evolution. "One of the reasons why people like Pokémon is the fact that they evolve, so we wanted to think of a way to make this even more appealing," says Junichi, "so I discussed this with the battle system designers, the graphic designers and we came up with the idea of a Mega Evolution that would take place just during the battle."

» *Omega Ruby* and *Alpha Sapphire* introduce the Soar mechanic, providing impressive views of Hoenn.

Previously, Pokémon could only change forms by evolving outside of battle. The new Mega Evolutions require Pokémon to be given Mega Stones to hold and they only happen during battle, reverting once the fight is over. "I really like Charizard, and I also like the Mega Evolutions of Charizard, but if it stayed like that I'd miss the old Charizard," he explains, offering some insight into why the Mega Evolutions are temporary.

With *Pokémon X* and *Y* enjoying strong sales, it's something of a surprise that the latest remake project has arrived so quickly. *Pokémon Omega Ruby* and *Alpha Sapphire* was released in 2014 to critical acclaim and is directed by Shigeru Ohmori, who started as a map designer on the original *Ruby* and *Sapphire*. Other recent hits have included *Pokémon Go*, an augmented reality game that was released in 2016 and remains insanely popular today, and *Pokémon Sun & Moon*, which were released the same year to rapturous acclaim. In fact, *Sun* and *Moon* proved to be so popular that enhanced '*Ultra*' versions were released the following year with new added features. Recently, we've seen the release of *Pokemon: Let's Go, Pikachu!* and *Let's Go, Eevee!*, which are essentially updated versions of *Pokémon Yellow*, along with a brand-new UK-inspired generation with *Pokemon Sword & Shield*.

If you've only ever experienced *Pokémon* passively, it's easy to write the series off as a late-Nineties kids fad, but this is a flawed perspective – with the original kids now grown up and still playing, the continued multimillion sales of the series rest on more than trends. You can see brand loyalty driving fan projects like Twitch Plays Pokémon, in which thousands of players collaborated in a chat room to complete *Pokémon Red* on a live stream. The truth is that the *Pokémon* games inspire that loyalty because they're deceptively deep RPGs, with battle systems that have been stretched by dedicated players and multiplayer features that truly bring players together. In the age of online gaming, a game that can still pack players into the same room is a real retro classic – and that's exactly what *Pokémon* is. ★

» *Pokémon Sword & Shield* let you 'Dynamax' your monsters, granting them a gigantic new form.

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come

INFO

- **Featured System:** GameCube
- **Year Released:** 2003
- **Publisher:** Nintendo
- **Developer:** Retro Studios
- **Key People:** Stephen Barcia (executive producer), Mark Pacini (lead designer), Todd Keller (lead artist)

GO DEEPER

- **Completing everything unlocks a gallery, where you get to see Samus's human face in concept.**
- **Early development screens indicate it got reasonably far in third-person – you can see Samus wandering around Chozo Ruins.**

METROID PRIME

Nintendo's seemingly odd choice of developer for a 3D return to Metroid resulted in one of the most perfectly constructed games of the GameCube generation

THE BACKGROUND

Nintendo failed to get a *Metroid* game off the ground on N64, finding neither the right ideas nor developer to take Samus into 3D. Meanwhile, Texas-based Nintendo affiliate developer Retro Studios, partly composed of former *Turok* team members from Iguana, was set up in 1998 and began work on a number of titles for the GameCube. After a visit from Shigeru Miyamoto in which Retro demonstrated the projects it had, the *Mario* creator wasn't impressed. However, based on the strength of one team's action-adventure prototype with a female lead, Retro was handed the *Metroid* licence and set to work, Miyamoto suggesting that *Prime* was switched from a third-person to a first-person viewpoint.

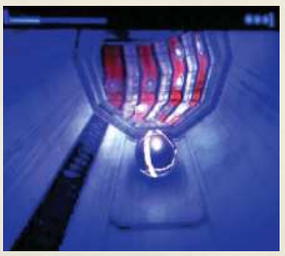
In 2002, Nintendo purchased the majority shares of Retro Studios, with founder Jeff Spangenberg ousted and management changing hands. Around this time, the other projects at Retro (a football title and promising-looking RPG *Raven Blade*, among others) were scrapped, with much of the studio staff laid off. The remaining team crunched to complete *Metroid Prime* – the first finished title to come out of this turbulent development culture – which would ultimately establish the studio's reputation.

THE GAME

Metroid Prime represents the perfect transition of a videogame from 2D to 3D, essentially recreating *Super Metroid* in a 3D space. Even though the game did passionately carry over the puzzle/adventure complexity of its SNES iteration, putting Samus Aran into first-person was a fascinating new way to play, and the focus on learning the intricacies of each level from this perspective would be vital to success. It wouldn't have been enough to only put a SNES game in a modern videogame template – Retro experimented with environmental design in a way that revolutionised what *Metroid* represented in the games industry.

The gargantuan, complex world of Tallon IV can only be conquered by understanding Samus's strengths and limitations. That's always transforming from hour

Things of note



Re-Primed on Wii

Prime was bundled with its two sequels into a Wii package that enabled you to play using motion controls. It's the indispensable version for series veterans.

Go West

Retro's input in major franchises for Nintendo has become significant since Prime's release, most recently working on *Donkey Kong: Tropical Freeze* and tracks for *Mario Kart 7*.

Frosty reception

Metroid Prime was approached cautiously upon the announcement that it would be a first-person game – it wasn't until hands-on demos that critics started to praise the decision.

Balls away

Third-person Morph Balling was also welcome, as it shifted the feel of *Metroid Prime* into something a little lighter – and resulted in some fantastic physics puzzles.

Samus link-up

Prime boasted what was arguably the best GameCube-GBA connectivity, when linked with *Metroid Fusion*: the *Fusion* skin for Samus, as well as the original NES game.

» *Prime*'s levels are densely packed, cleverly designed to provoke the player's interest using the scanning visor.

» The various creatures frequently respawn, an irritating hangover from antiquated game mechanics.

What the press thought

NowGamer.com
Score: 9.8
"It's well thought out and the gameplay is perfectly balanced in every way."

games™
Score: 10/10
"Buy it, play it, love it and then play it all over again – there really is no other way to describe it. Just brilliant."

to hour, as the player unlocks different armour sets, visors and beams, none of which are inconsequential. Each power is designed to help in some small fashion, with that gradual process of discovering items provoking lateral thinking when you backtrack to areas and see what extra potential lies within them. It's a rewarding, open structure that again harks back to *Super Metroid*.

Every environment tells its own story, too, from the icy landscapes of Phendrana Drifts to the vaguely scary Phazon Mines. *Metroid Prime* largely takes place in enclosed spaces and labyrinthine tunnel layouts, but the stunning fidelity of the art direction makes for a unique feeling of exploration on Tallon IV, as these vastly different locations overlap with each other in a harmonious way. This is another reason why the decision to make the game in first-person paid off – there really are so few videogames that populate 3D spaces as compellingly as this.

The planet *is* the story in *Metroid Prime*. The scanning mechanic, enabling the player to examine almost every object and enemy, gives background minutiae about Tallon IV that creates a more interactive approach to the narrative. At a time when voice-acted, expositional cut-scenes were becoming prominent, making the bulk of the story something that you have to uncover was a forward-thinking decision. Graphically, it also helped that Samus's character model was the most impressive visual people had seen on the GameCube to date.

Whatever players discover about the planet, Tallon IV remains enigmatic, and you're always exploring it with a sense of trepidation. Nothing is quite as it seems, and it's that combination of eerie audio design – which nicely recalls past *Metroid* games, too – and visual imagination that really made *Metroid Prime* a critical darling.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

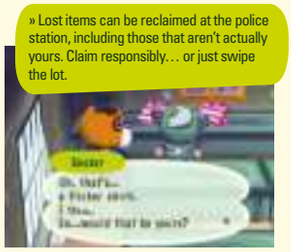
Metroid Prime is the kind of game that we doubt today's casual-aware Nintendo would make – it's complex without pandering to the player, requiring patience before the true intelligence of its design becomes clear. *Metroid*'s move into 3D was as creatively significant as *Zelda*'s had been five years earlier, and stood as a demonstration that the mechanics laid out in the NES and SNES-era *Metroid* titles were built to last on future platforms.

What Retro brought to the series, though, was the understanding of how the smallest details of a 3D environment should affect the player's experience, and that lending each facet of a world some kind of hidden meaning would heighten our fascination with the game.

Nintendo's touting of *Prime* as a 'first-person adventure' rather than an FPS may have smacked of corporate nonsense at the time, but the description was absolutely spot-on. Shooting is simply a means to an end; just a single mechanic along the way in figuring out how to move forward in an immense, unsettling world. *Metroid Prime* was never imitated, and it ranks alongside *Half-Life 2* in its scope of what a first-person videogame can portray.

The History Of Animal Crossing™

Work, bills, commitments, taxes… yeah, real life sucks. Let's cast off all of that rubbish and go live among the woodland creatures for a while as we reflect on the impact and evolution of Nintendo's oh-so-pleasant life sim



» Lost items can be reclaimed at the police station, including those that aren't actually yours. Claim responsibly… or just swipe the lot.

Few companies can turn failure into a success story quite like Nintendo. Whether it's the Wii U games that tanked on release but are suddenly must-have games on Switch, or turning the fortunes of the laughed-out-of-town DS around almost overnight and growing it into one of the most successful handhelds ever, the Midas touch is very real. Even in its darkest hours, Nintendo has proven itself capable of coming back better than ever, and this story begins with what, in hindsight, has to be seen as one of the greatest misplays in the company's history. The failed Sony deal saw Nintendo enter the fifth generation of consoles with the N64, the only machine still backing the cartridge horse – whether through stubbornness, legal land mines, reliance on existing expertise or something else entirely, it was the only console of that gen that wasn't riding the CD wave. But as the benefits of this new medium came to light and close partners started taking their games to platforms where they could both expand their horizons and mass-produce products for less, Nintendo reluctantly reached for the 'conform' button. Well, sort of.

So botched was the Japan-only 64DD disc add-on for the N64 that it warrants further discussion. The add-on was announced before the N64 itself even shipped and suffered myriad delays in reaching market, in which time numerous massive games dropped support. Opting for a magnetic disk solution meant it could only offer ten per cent of the capacity of a CD, while its existence as an add-on

» A few special digging spots spawn every day – grab a shovel and go get yourself some sweet fossils or creepy new Gyroids.

30+ MILLION UNITS

Animal Crossing has been a huge success for Nintendo, with the brand selling over 30 million units.

» *New Leaf*'s rolling scenery is a lovely little touch that helps keep performance steady and makes the town feel bigger than it really is.

rather than an intrinsic part of the new console probably struck fear into those who had seen Sega soil itself twice in quick succession with the Mega CD and the 32X just a few years before. The promise of cartridge load times with disc capacities and internet connectivity proved to be ahead of its time in terms of vision and behind it in execution, and the 64DD ended up with just nine released titles… but it's the list of planned games that ended up elsewhere as a result of this abject failure that proves far more interesting. Series like *Dragon Quest* and *Resident Evil* took their next games to new consoles, most of the more ambitious projects that required the hybrid tech were cancelled outright, while many huge first-party titles like *Zelda*, *Donkey Kong* and *Paper Mario* were scaled back to work as pure cart-only games for N64. You might see the title *Dobutsu no Mori* among the list of such games that eventually made their way to N64 and think little of it, but it's actually a pretty big deal – that's what you might know as *Animal Forest*, the quirky and unique village life simulation that would later be upgraded, improved, and re-released the following generation as *Animal Crossing*.

One of the flagship features of the 64DD was to have a system-level real-time clock, which the very concept of *Dobutsu no Mori* was built around. In order to ship the game on cartridge, Nintendo needed to include a clock chip in the cart itself to facilitate the game's direct correlation between real-world time and in-game time – a more complex and costly process that caused the ▶

» The first hour or so serves as a tutorial where you work for Nook and run through the main ways to earn Bells. After that, you're on your own.

» Trees can hide cool items in their branches, but shake too many and you'll usually wind up angering bees and getting stung like this poor fella.

NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

A few of the fuzzy faces you can expect to befriend

K.K. SLIDER

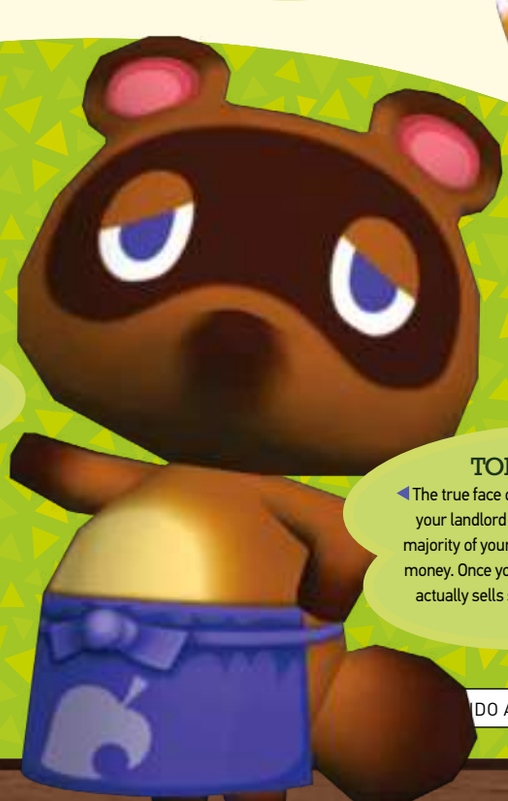
▲ Your resident bard, this pick-wielding pooch shows up on Saturday evenings to serenade you with various delightful tunes, should you ask him to play for you. He's always happy to do so.

TORTIMER

◀ The town's elderly mayor is a staple of the series, although he's often too busy to be out and about. You'll probably only bump into him during special events, which he always attends and/or officiates.

REDD

▶ There's something shady about this fox, although you should still check out his totally legit wares whenever his market rolls into town. Does this look like someone who would rip you off? Um…



TOM NOOK

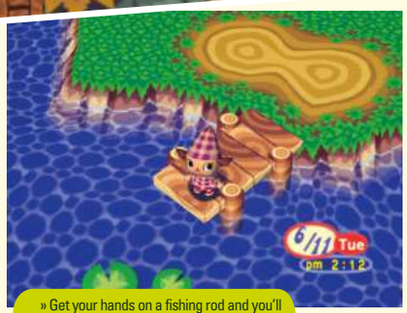
◀ The true face of evil, Nook is technically your landlord and you will spend the majority of your time in town owing him money. Once you get past that, his shop actually sells some pretty neat stuff.

The History Of...

Animal Crossing

» You can ride the train to other players' towns, although visits are much easier to make in later versions of the game.

» Chatting to Rover on your first train ride into town determines your gender and starting appearance, based on how you answer his questions.



» Get your hands on a fishing rod and you'll be able to reel in all kinds of sea creatures, which vary by season.

game to release right at the tail end of the N64's life in April 2001, just a few months before the launch of the GameCube and almost a year after the PlayStation 2. Despite the game's charming aesthetic and unique premise, it was swiftly buried under hype for more technically impressive games, but Nintendo wasn't going to let the animals escape quite so readily. Instead, the decision was made to port *Dobutsu no Mori* across to the GameCube in order to give the game a second chance. The on-board clock and calendar of Nintendo's new console opened up even more possibilities and its graphically simple nature made moving home less demanding that it might have been for other more technically challenging games, allowing Nintendo to get the enhanced version onto GameCube in Japan by the end of that same year. The villagers weren't quite ready for an overseas visit just yet, however – unsurprisingly, a game about conversing with hundreds of unique characters in unique scenarios is quite the project for a localisation team, causing the US version to land nine months later in September 2002. The PAL release didn't come until a full two years after that, finally showing up in Europe in September 2004.

***Animal Crossing* is a game where you do… well, not a lot, really.** It's one of the most chilled-out games ever made, one where you just wander around your little village, making friends with the neighbouring animal folk and doing menial tasks to slowly, *sloooowly* chip away at your crushing debt to resident capitalist tyrant Tom Nook – the devil in a raccoon disguise, basically. His laissez-faire approach to collecting his dues is welcome, but he still charges exorbitant fees just to improve your squalid little living space into something you can be proud to call a home, tempting you all the while with an ever-changing stock of neat furniture and useful tools that will only serve to drain your Bells – the game's suitably quaint currency – and prolong the process of upgrading and expanding your homestead. Similarly,

BLATHERS

▼ Curator of the museum and general know-it-all, Blathers will take your bugs and rarities off you to display them in the museum. Best to visit him at night, as he's a little sleepy during the day.

JOAN

▼ Bells burning a hole in your pocket? Time to start playing the turnip Stalk Market. Joan's veggies – only available on Sunday mornings – fluctuate in price over the next week, but be sure to sell before they go bad.

MR. RESETTI

▲ This mole will turn up to give you an earful any time you quit the game without saving and then return, in order to dissuade save scumming. His rants get longer the more times you do it, so… y'know, don't.

SAHARAH

▲ Unlike Redd, Saharah's wares are all above board and her selection of rare carpets and wallpapers always makes her worth chatting to if you're lucky enough to be paid a visit.

museum curator Blathers would have you turn over valuable fossils, fish and bugs to him in the interest of preservation, though these are among the more lucrative items to sell for healthy profits. You've got a raccoon exploiting your materialistic nature on one side and an owl tapping into your completionist compulsions on the other, a pincer movement designed to keep your Bell balance in check and drag out the process of one day *maybe* ridding yourself of debt… it's a delightful and relaxing game at face value but viewed like this, it can almost feel like a busman's holiday – a fuzzy, primary-coloured re-creation of what is going on on the other side of the TV screen for many of us.

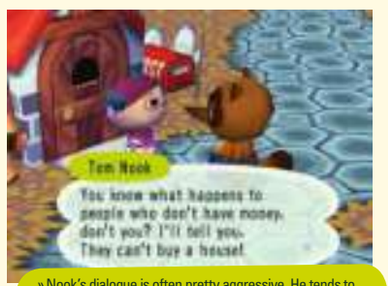
Why is this not a problem? Why is it fine for these woodland critters to intentionally slow down the one part of the game that can be seen as making genuine, tangible gameplay progress? Well, the answer is two-fold. First off, the day-to-day rigmarole isn't a grind – it's what's fun about the game. It's not something designed to be played for hours at a time, rather a game best enjoyed piecemeal over a much longer time frame. Regular events and holidays promote return visits even when you might not otherwise have planned to play, while the simple act of checking in daily to see what's new in the village is satisfying in its own way – there are always new things to dig up, catch, harvest and work for, and even just seeing your home and its surroundings at different times of day and during different seasons helps you develop an attachment to this second life you've chosen for yourself, as well as with those who surround you. And that's the second reason why slow progress isn't an issue: it makes the connections you make and the bonds you develop with the other villagers feel more special, more important, more *real*. Check in daily with your furry friends and they'll meaningfully grow around you, adopting your mannerisms and fashion, writing you letters, offering you gifts, and even expressing concern when you don't show your face in town for a few days. The more you play, the more you become part of the town itself, and coming back to the game after a little time away to a letter from a favourite villager telling you that they've moved away can be a bitter pill to swallow. But there'll be new friends to make. There always are, forever.

800,000 UNITS

■ *Animal Crossing: New Leaf* sold over 800,000 units in its first week on sale in Japan.

For a game born of failed hardware, it was somewhat surprising to see *Animal Crossing* court console add-ons for a second time with its support for the e-Reader Game Boy Advance card scanner. The game already supported linking to a GBA for several novel features, primarily the ability to visit the offshore island in search of rare fruits and extra Bells, but also to offer a pattern designer tool for use at the clothes shop and to allow handheld play of some of the featured NES games that players might be able to find, win, or buy for their homes. e-Reader support took this a step further, allowing players to interact with a device at the Post Office then scan special collectible cards via a connected GBA and e-Reader to introduce new elements to the town – music cards could change the town's tune to be one of wandering musician K.K. Slider's songs, pattern cards offered unique (often Nintendo-themed) clothing designs, while scanning a character card would cause that particular animal to write to the player with a gift. It was a novelty at best (which could be said of the e-Reader in general, to be fair) and wasn't even included for the PAL release, but the four sets of released cards still serve as a cool collector's item for fans, even if only a few of them ever offered anything that bordered on useful in the game. ▶

» Chatting to villagers regularly and sending them letters and gifts is the best way to avoid them packing their bags and leaving town.



» Nook's dialogue is often pretty aggressive. He tends to apologise swiftly, but he can never disguise the fact that he is an evil, evil creature at heart.

MABEL & SABLE ABLE

▼ These twins run the clothes shop, and you'll quickly notice that Mabel is a little more outgoing than her sister. Keep visiting, though, and Sable might open up to you eventually...

"Slow progress isn't an issue: it makes the bonds you develop feel more important, more real"

KAPP'N

▶ If you're crossing over to the island, this salty sea dog (well, kappa) will be your ferryman. Expect to hear some cracking shanties on your crossing, many of them likely about snails.

The History Of...
Animal Crossing

KING OF THE VILLAGE

Six tips to help make town life a little easier

GET FRUITY

Any fruit found naturally in your own village won't sell for a lot of Bells, but Tom Nook will pay well over the odds for non-native produce. Bring back something exotic and either sell it for a quick buck, or plant and grow it if you're playing the long game.

TURNIP TIME

Joan's turnips can make you huge stacks of Bells if you play often enough to check prices regularly. Tom Nook's offer changes twice per day, so you can easily wait for one that gives you a great return on your investment... so long as you don't get too greedy and let your nest egg rot.

SET YOUR CALENDAR

You should aim to catch holidays, festivals and other special events whenever possible. There are usually rare goodies to grab, but you could always tinker with your console calendar to cheat your way into them if you're unable to catch them live.

YOU'RE FIRED

Not a fan of one of your current neighbours? Wind them up with Pitfall Seeds and by snubbing their requests while playing nice with the rest of the town and there's a good chance they'll pack their bags. Visit other towns to scout for fresh blood to make their eviction more likely.

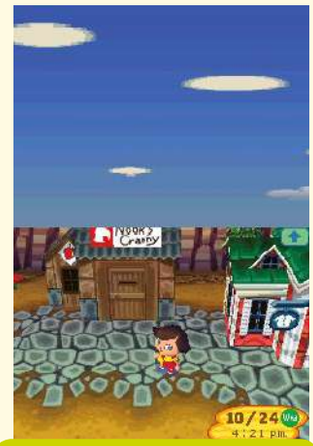
LIVE WITHIN YOUR MEANS

Yes, there are loads of cool things you *could* buy to decorate your dingy little home, but it's a much better idea to live off hand-me-down items until you've paid off Tom Nook enough to have a house that's actually worth decorating.

EARN MORE CASH

Sometimes, rocks will spit out bags of Bells when struck with a shovel. Usually, you can only get a handful of money bags out of them, but you can game the system by digging holes directly behind you before you start whacking to prevent knockback and get more hits in.

"New Leaf made meaningful, productive and player-friendly changes to the core concept"



» The second screen in *Wild World* is mainly used for menus, but passing balloons can drop items if you have a slingshot to pop them with.

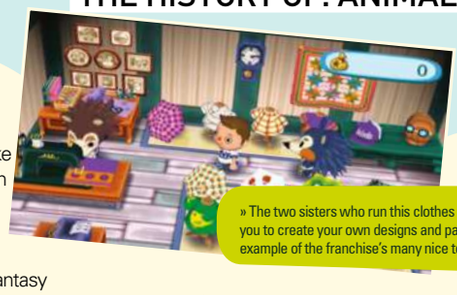
While this low-level GBA interaction made it pretty clear that the handheld wasn't capable of pushing out a full *Animal Crossing* game of its own, the fact that its successor launched with an N64 port as its flagship launch title told an entirely different story. The little-and-often gameplay style of *Animal Crossing* made the title a perfect fit for a portable console like the DS, with *Animal Crossing: Wild World* arriving just outside the handheld's first year. It was a perfect storm – the handheld was struggling to find its footing, but here was this game with universal appeal and a play style that couldn't be more perfectly suited to a portable system, and *Wild World* proved to be a monumental success, eventually bagging itself a place in the top ten most successful games in the system's entire library. It was a well-deserved victory, too. *Wild World* iterated on *Animal Crossing*'s core concepts spectacularly, doing away with screen transitions to make the full village one big open play space (replete with a new 'rolling' visual style to make it feel even larger), offering a second screen and touch control for simpler inventory management, and incorporating online components to

allow friends to visit one another remotely, although removing timed holiday events in order to ease the localisation process was met with some criticism. This simplification did allow Nintendo to get the game out across all major territories in just three months compared to the original's three years, though, so it proved to be a sacrifice worth making in the interest of getting everyone playing at the same time.

2020

■ *New Horizons* arrived just in time to take the sting out of the COVID-19 lockdown.

After a rather innocuous inception, *Animal Crossing* was finally a top-flight brand for Nintendo – in terms of first-party DS titles, only the holy trinity of *Mario, Zelda* and *Pokémon* tracked better, in fact. It came as no surprise, then, that Nintendo would look to continue this success on its must-have new home console and the insane popularity of the Wii served as a perfect launchpad to propel this charming franchise to even greater heights. What a shame, then, that *Let's Go To The City* (or *City Folk*, as it was known in the US) managed to miss the point so spectacularly. This is a series that revels in the escapism of quiet village life and while it was more or less business as usual on that front (with seasonal holidays reinstated and a few minor improvements), the inclusion of a new city area to visit really put pay to the idea of settling down in a remote rural village away from the hustle and bustle of urban life. While the core loop of *Animal Crossing* may not be the easiest of things to expand or iterate upon in any meaningful way, this just felt like a misstep, a move at odds with what the game was all about. The addition of optional voice chat during online multiplayer really didn't sit right, either – in a fantasy world where everyone speaks in adorable gobbledegook noises and twee catchphrases, the last thing you want to hear is another human gibbering on in the background to break the illusion of actually being part of this quaint little idyllic home away from home.



» The two sisters who run this clothes shop will allow you to create your own designs and patterns. It's another example of the franchise's many nice touches.

But what better way to right the ship than by leaving these odd design decisions in the past and turning over a New Leaf. Returning to handhelds in the hope of replicating the success of *Wild World, Animal Crossing: New Leaf* arrived on 3DS in 2013 and for the first time, it made meaningful, productive and player-friendly changes to the core concept. Rather than coming into town as a fresh-faced nobody, you were instead welcomed as the town's new mayor – a role that proved to be just as easy as Tortimer had made it look for the previous decade. It was a new system that didn't change the core gameplay loop one bit, but that catered better to individual habits and play styles, letting those with limited play time pass bills to have shops open earlier or close later, for instance, or to have other villagers assist in upkeep to keep your town spotless. This new position of power also allowed for significant quality-of-life improvements, from building bridges to making remote spots on the map more accessible to constructing new facilities, each with their own functions and additional characters to meet. While the core gameplay changed little, these seemingly minor tweaks made it all the more respectful of player time – a welcome feature in a game designed to be played daily and for months on end. The gameplay utility of the city's extra facilities was retained, but crossing the train tracks to visit a slightly suburban-feeling row of shops and houses felt less out of place than upping sticks for a full-on city, with buildings on the outskirts retaining that rustic feel of the main village and even including some staple components such as the museum to free up even more space in your own little plot of paradise. With Nook's kids taking over the general store, Tom himself moved into the real estate business (because of course he did) and continued to scalp new residents for sub-standard housing… not even the mayor is safe from the dollar-signs-for-eyes raccoon fiend, it appears.

New Leaf left the series in a good place, and that success continued in the 2020 Switch sequel, *New Horizons*. This follow-up gives you an entire deserted island to build upon and shape as you see fit, and has become a critical and commercial darling.

It's remarkable that *Animal Crossing* is up there with Nintendo's top franchises despite being their polar opposite – so many Nintendo titles are built on pure glorious gameplay, while *Animal Crossing* features very little of what would traditionally be described as such. Regardless, its unique nature as a sedate and charming game that can be played all year round makes *Animal Crossing* something we'll never stop playing. Mainly because we're perpetually in debt to a capitalist raccoon, but also because they're wonderful games to enjoy when you just want to turn off the world for a bit.

» Gaze upon the true face of evil. No matter how many Bells you earn, you will probably still owe this rascal most of them.

SPINNING AROUND

The spin-off titles that left town to do their own thing

ANIMAL CROSSING: HAPPY HOME DESIGNER

■ Doubling down on the house customisation aspect of the mainline games, *Happy Home Designer* bins off the rest of the life sim stuff and is significantly weaker as a result. While there *is* an odd satisfaction to getting a resident's brief spot-on, you can get the same kind of passive satisfaction from any number of brain-dissolving reality TV shows, so stick to the mainline games.

ANIMAL CROSSING PLAZA

■ Not really a game so much as a modified reskin of the Wii U's Miiverse feature, this oddity let you wander round a simple town square, chatting with various characters from *New Leaf* (the 3DS game this spin-off sort of tied into) and… well, that's about it. It was removed from the eShop at the end of 2014, so you couldn't play it now even if you wanted to. Good job you don't.

ANIMAL CROSSING: AMIIBO FESTIVAL

■ It's *Mario Party* but without the mini-games, and it's about as good as that sounds. Not only is the board game aspect really dull, but as the name suggests, a heavy reliance on Amiibo means it's basically pointless if you don't have a solid selection of toys and cards to scan into the game. To be fair, it's basically pointless either way.

ANIMAL CROSSING: POCKET CAMP

■ Nintendo's foray into mobile gaming has been pretty darn successful and while this simplified spin-off might be among the weakest of the Nintendo apps, it's still been fairly well received. Decorating a campsite might not be quite as satisfying as having a full town to play with, but it's a small sacrifice for being able to get a small slice of *Animal Crossing* in seconds, whenever you like.

Fire Emblem

IF NINTENDO DID THE LORD OF THE RINGS

» RETROREVIVAL

» GAME BOY ADVANCE
» INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS » 2003

Many people assume that *Fire Emblem* is a simple fantasy re-skin of *Advance Wars*. Those people are wrong.

While it looks similar to the Game Boy Advance game (which is hardly surprising as they're by the same developer) there are many subtle, but important differences between the two games. The first is that *Fire Emblem*, like *Advance Wars,* is a franchise that has been knocking around since the Famicom days, with the first game in the series appearing in Japan in 1990.

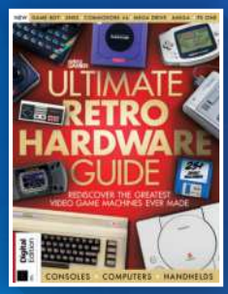
Then there's the fact that *Fire Emblem* is a proper RPG with turn-based strategy elements, instead of a strategy game with an okay story tacked on. It has a large number of genuinely fleshed out characters that feel a world away from the caricatures found in the *Advance Wars* series. The characters feel so complete that you actually care about them, which brings us on to one of the other big differences between the two franchises.

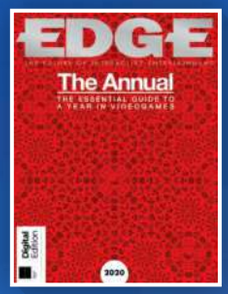
Unlike *Advance Wars*, your characters actually go into battle themselves, and (in most games) when they die, they're dead forever… Admittedly you can restart the chapter and go through the level again, but the inclusion of permadeath makes your bond with each character become that much deeper. You care about the fact that Lyn has lost her parents, and as new characters join her surrogate family, you find yourself doing everything you can to protect them so that you can continue playing with them. It makes you consider every possible move you make, adding an almost *Chess*-like level to the gameplay, as you constantly try to outthink your opponent.

The *Fire Emblem* series may have taken its time to appear in the West, but the wait was certainly worth it, and with prices continually climbing online there's never been a better time to jump on board the franchise. *

Kent
MISS!
HIT
DMG
CRT
Iron sword
20

Discover the origins of all your favourite characters





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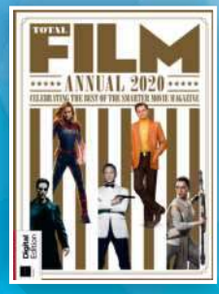

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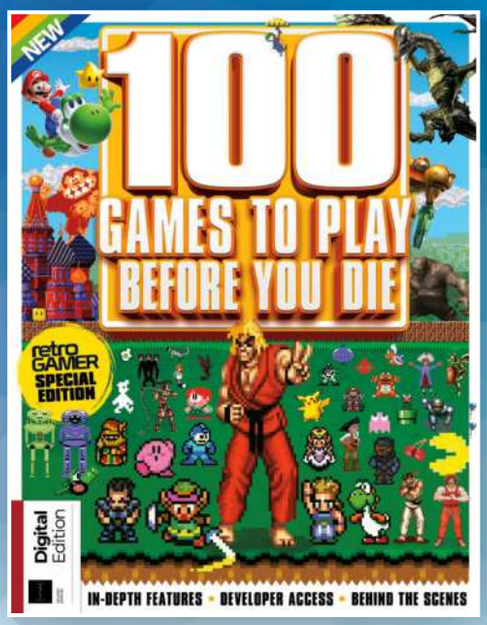

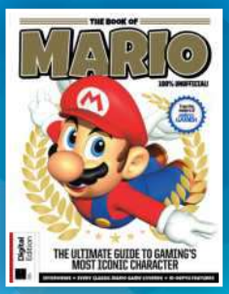

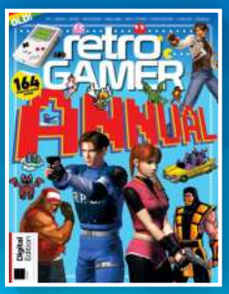

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